

1986

# Para-Social Interaction, Rhetorical Sensitivity, and Television News Viewing.

Michael Anthony Domingue

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College*

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**Para-social interaction, rhetorical sensitivity, and television news  
viewing**

**Domingue, Michael Anthony, Ph.D.**

**THE LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COL., 1986**

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**PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTION,  
RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY, AND  
TELEVISION NEWS VIEWING**

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**in**

**The Department of Speech Communication,  
Theatre, and Communication Disorders**

**by**

**Michael A. Domingue**

**B.S., University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1978**

**M.S., University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1979**

**December, 1986**



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Michael Domingue

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## **Abstract**

**This study sought to determine the relationship between para-social interaction (an imaginary interaction with mass media) with local and network news viewing and rhetorical sensitivity (an attitude toward encoding spoken messages). It was predicted that para-social interaction would be positively related to rhetorical sensitivity. The Rubin, Perse, and Powell PSI Scale was used to measure para-social interaction. The three internal scales of the Hart, Carlson and Eadie RHETSEN II Scale (the Noble Self Scale, the Rhetorical Reflector Scale and the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale) were used to measure rhetorical sensitivity.**

**157 undergraduates enrolled in communication courses responded to scales. A canonical correlation was performed using the criterion variables of PSI Local and PSI Network, and the predictors variables of scores on the Noble Self Scale, the Rhetorical Reflector Scale, and the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale. Subsequent Pearson correlations were performed on the individual variables.**

**The results of the canonical correlation were not significant. The Pearson correlations demonstrated a weak, but significant positive relationship between both PSI Local and PSI Network and the Noble Self Scale. A weak, but significant negative relationship between PSI Local and the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale is also demonstrated. No significant relationship was found between PSI and the Rhetorical Reflector Scale. The results indicated the opposite of the predicted relationship. As rhetorical sensitivity increases, the tendency to engage in para-social interaction decreases. The nature of communicative choices and the nature of intrapersonal communication are the focus of the explanation for the conflicting results. Feedback, inherent in interpersonal communication and absent in mass communication, may serve as the distinguishing factor.**

**The Rubin, Perse, and Powell PSI Scale is shown to be reliable for measuring para-social interaction with both local and network television news viewing. A high**

correlation exists between para-social interaction with local and network news viewing.

Recommendations include future research to prove that the contrary direction of the results are accurate and to further investigate the relationship between mass communication and interpersonal communication.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

**Electronic media are a significant part of American life. The number of television sets and radios exceeds the population in the United States (Cassata and Asante, 1979, p. 100-101). The American public uses television in a myriad of ways. One person may choose to watch a soap opera or situation comedy to fulfill the need for entertainment. Another may choose to view a documentary or do-it-yourself program to fulfill a need for understanding. Still another may choose a talk show or news program to fulfill the need for information.**

**Past researchers have suggested that television may serve to fulfill a basic need for social interaction (Nordlund, 1978; Rosengren and Windahl, 1972). Some argue television is a "functional alternative" to interpersonal, face-to-face communication (McQuail and Windahl, 1981). People may choose to view television if they do not wish to or cannot fulfill the need for social interaction through face-to-face interaction. Rubin and Rubin (1985) argue that media and interpersonal channels "are potentially coequal alternatives that vary in terms of their primary or alternative nature" (p. 39). Mass media communication and interpersonal communication may serve to fulfill similar needs.**

**In 1956, Horton and Wohl integrated a relationship between mass media and interpersonal communication. They argued that television gives "the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer" (p. 215). They called this imaginary face-to-media relationship para-social interaction. This illusion of an interpersonal transaction is encouraged by a media performer's conversational style and television's visual techniques, such as close-up camera shots. Programs which focus on a single performer are prone to this illusion:**

**... of particular interest is the creation by these  
[radio and television] media of a new type of**

performer: quizmasters, announcers,  
 "interviewers" in a new "show business" world  
 - in brief, a special category of "personalities"  
 whose existence is a function of the media  
 themselves...we shall call them personae.  
 (p. 216)

Today's television newscaster is a good example of Horton and Wohl's persona. The persona offers a regular, continuous relationship which can appear to the viewer to develop over time.

Several investigations have focused on para-social interaction. Many of these investigations have taken the uses and gratifications approach to the study of mass media communication. The uses and gratifications approach "seeks to explain the role of the mass media for the individuals and the society from the perspective of the consumer" (Rubin and Rubin, 1985, p. 36). McQuail and Windahl (1981) explain the difference between the traditional effects approach and the uses and gratifications approach to the study of mass media: "instead of studying what the media do with people; let us study what people do with media" (p. 75). The uses and gratifications approach is predicated on the individual making a media choice to fulfill some felt need. Making that choice involves selecting the medium prior to use, using the medium, and being gratified by that use.

A primary assumption of the uses and gratifications approach is the active audience. Levy and Windahl (1984) describe typology of audience activity with two dimensions, a qualitative dimension and a temporal dimension. The qualitative dimension is the audience's orientation toward the communication process. It can be divided into three values: audience selectivity, audience involvement, and audience use. The temporal dimension concerns the phases of the communication sequence: before, during, and after exposure. Para-social interaction occurs "during exposure" to the media.

There is little empirical research focusing on para-social interaction and the communication process. Rubin (1981) suggests that

"[s]ocial and communication influences ... usually have been ignored. Additional mass media and interpersonal communication sources need to be considered for a clearer understanding of the mass communication process. (p. 530)

Research has been conducted toward an understanding of para-social interaction. However, Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) point out that "although media and performer characteristics that encourage the development of the parasocial relationship are partially understood, the intrapersonal mechanisms are not" (p. 157). This study seeks a better understanding of para-social interaction during exposure to the media by examining its relationship to the communication process, with an emphasis on intrapersonal processes.

Rubin and Rubin (1985) argue that the "assumptions of uses and gratifications ... are consistent with those of a variety of interpersonal communication orientations" (p. 49). One concept that holds some promise to a better understanding of what influences para-social interaction is rhetorical sensitivity. Rhetorical sensitivity is defined as "a particular attitude toward encoding spoken messages" (Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, 1980, p. 2). Rhetorical sensitivity is a person's attitude toward interpersonal communication which influences his or her face-to-face interactions with others. Para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity possess sufficiently similar characteristics to suggest a relationship. The present study seeks a better understanding of para-social interaction during exposure to the media by investigating its relationship to rhetorical sensitivity.

Gregg (1971) confirmed the existence of a para-social interaction in relation to

television news viewing by persons 60 years and older. Subsequent investigations (Houlberg, 1984; Levy, 1979; Levy and Windahl, 1984; Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn, 1980; Rubin, Perse, and Powell, 1985; and Wenner, 1982) have focused on para-social interaction and television news viewing. For the purposes of this study, local news and network news programs will be used to examine the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity.

The proposed study is an extension of the work initiated by Levy and Windahl (1984) investigating media use and the communication sequence. They note "the very real possibility that audience activity and gratifications stand as important intervening variables in the communication process" (p. 74). The actual communication process in mass media communication needs to be addressed. Rubin and Rubin (1982) argue that "[i]t would be valuable to consider the linkages among interpersonal communication ... and television use that render television to be an important communication vehicle for some persons" (p. 242). This study will investigate the relationship between television viewing and interpersonal communication.

The review of pertinent literature, specific hypotheses, research methodology, and results will be explained in the remaining chapters. Chapter 2 includes a brief discussion of mass media and interpersonal communication and a description of the para-social interaction. This is followed by a discussion of the uses and gratifications approach to mass communication with an emphasis on audience activity and a review of empirical investigations into para-social interaction. The chapter continues with a description of rhetorical sensitivity, a review of the development of a rhetorical sensitivity measure known as the RHETSEN II Scale, and the characteristic relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. Chapter 2 concludes with the rationale, research questions, and hypotheses.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to investigate the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. This chapter includes a description of the instruments used to measure para-social interaction and rhetorical

sensitivity, questionnaire construction, sampling procedure, sample size, and statistical analysis.

Chapter 4 examines the results of the statistical analysis and the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the results and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 6 concludes the study with suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Mass Media and Interpersonal Communication**

**Gumpert and Cathcart (1979) argue that "every type of human communication ... is basically an interpersonal communicative act" (p. 154). This is not to say that all communication is an interpersonal, face-to-face interaction. They explain that all of the necessary components to any communicative act are found in interpersonal communication. Berger and Luckman (1966) support this argument by noting the face-to-face situation is "the prototypical case of social interaction" (p. 28). Interpersonal communication, then, can serve as "a touchstone for measuring all communication" (Gumpert and Cathcart, 1979, p. 154).**

**McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) suggest that "media use is most suitably characterized as an interactive process" (p. 144). Some mass media researchers have taken an interpersonal approach to the study of mass media communication. Radio and television have been examined as an interpersonal phenomenon. In the early 1960's, Mendelsohn (1964) examined the function and uses of radio in the New York Metropolitan Area. He concluded that people listen to radio stations to satisfy a variety of psychological needs. Mendelsohn identified four principal functions of radio stations:**

- 1. A utilitarian information or news function**
- 2. An active mood accompaniment function**
- 3. A psychological release function**
- 4. A friendly companionship function.**

**(p. 248)**

**Dominick (1974) supports the function of radio as a fulfiller of psychological needs. He investigated children's peer group membership and their relationship to radio usage. He discovered that low peer group membership was related to higher radio usage. He also found that those with low peer group contacts listened to the radio more**



for informational reasons than entertainment. The fewer interpersonal contacts a child had, the more he listened to the radio.

Turow (1974) and Avery and Ellis (1978) examined the radio talk show. This type of program format offers the listener the opportunity for mediated interaction. A listener could call in and actually speak with the talk show host or guest. Turow found a strong need for interpersonal communication to be the principal motivating factor for listener-callers. Avery and Ellis concluded that listener-participation programs can perform similar functions for the listener as well as the participant. They also noted that talk show radio serves as an interpersonal outlet for the socially isolated. It might also create a communication network for those who are physically separated, but share similar interests.

We can conclude that radio listening serves more than just information and entertainment functions. Research shows that radio can be a companion. Radio listening is influenced by interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, interpersonal relationships are influenced by radio listening behavior. And, finally, listening to radio can serve as a substitute for interpersonal communication. The next section looks at television from a particular interpersonal perspective.

### **Para-Social Interaction**

Mass media communication has been examined using an interpersonal approach. Previous studies have examined radio listening from an interpersonal perspective. Television, too, has been examined as an interpersonal phenomenon. Horton and Wohl (1956) suggest that a pseudo-form of interpersonal interaction exists between the television viewer and the television performer. Horton and Wohl explain that "in television, especially, the image which is presented makes available nuances of appearance and gesture ... to which interaction is cued" (p. 215). Conversational style, gestures, and imagery techniques, such as close-up camera shots, work to give "the

illusion of a face-to-face relationship with the performer" (p. 215). Horton and Wohl call this face-to-media relationship *para-social interaction*.

Horton and Strauss (1957) describe para-social interaction in contrast to two other forms of interaction: personal interaction and vicarious interaction. Personal interaction is equivalent to face-to-face, interpersonal communication. Personal interaction is characterized by "full reciprocity" (p. 580). Each individual has the option of sending and receiving feedback. Each individual adjusts his or her communication, taking into account the other individual. Everyday conversations are examples of personal interaction.

Vicarious interaction occurs when an individual spectator views the interaction of others. The spectator may assume roles of individual actors, but he or she is only an observer. The individual possesses no control over the interaction. He or she merely watches. The spectator has the "privilege of observing and the obligation not to intervene" (p. 580). The members of an audience viewing a live or recorded performance, such as a play or motion picture, are said to engage in vicarious interaction.

Para-social interaction possesses characteristics similar to both personal and vicarious interaction. The spectator viewing a television program may imagine himself or herself to be engaged in personal interaction. The perceived reciprocal qualities are an illusion created by the performer, accepted by the spectator. On the other hand, viewing a television program is characteristic of vicarious interaction in that the spectator is watching a performance. The performers are in complete control. Reciprocal intervention by the spectator is impossible. Para-social interaction occurs when an individual spectator perceives a television program as an interpersonal communicative event. Para-social interaction is, by nature, intrapersonal, occurring in the mind of the individual.

The likelihood that an individual would engage in para-social interaction is related to the type of television program. One type of program with a strong affinity for

para-social interaction is the personality program. The personality program focuses on one individual. Examples of personality programs are single entertainer shows, such as "The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson," single interviewer shows, such as "Donahue," and single newscaster shows, such as a network evening news program. Horton and Wohl (1956) call these personality performers *personae*. The persona's existence is solely a function of the media whose goal is to achieve an "illusion of intimacy" (p. 216).

Personae offer a regular, continuous relationship which can appear to the viewer to develop over time. Regularity of exposure allows the viewer to maintain a consistent role without the demands of change inherent in an interpersonal relationship. However, the para-social relationship is "one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development" (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 215). The development of the relationship takes place only in the mind of the viewer.

For para-social interaction to occur, the viewer must perform two mental acts. First, he or she must adapt to the performer. Some adaptation to another is necessary in any interaction if communication is to be achieved at all. However, this is not to be confused with suspending disbelief, which a spectator may do at a play or motion picture. The individual adapts to, and accepts, the persona's role.

The second act necessary for para-social interaction is for the viewer to accept the appropriate answering role. This involves the first act of adapting to the persona as a person. It also includes accepting a particular role described by the persona. The persona, by implication and suggestion, specifies an appropriate answering role for the spectator to complete the interaction. Horton and Wohl (1956) explain

[t]he audience is expected to accept the situation defined by the program format as credible, and to concede as "natural" the rules and conventions governing the actions performed and the values realized. It should play the role of the loved one to the persona's lover; the

admiring dependent to his father-surrogate;  
 the earnest citizen to his fearless opponent of  
 political evils. (p. 219)

The function of the program can be to provide news or offer entertainment by a single entertainer. The program's function and the success of the persona depend not on the audience's perception of an answering role, but rather on the role-enactment specified by the persona to complete the performance. Without role-enactment by the spectator, the interaction is simply vicarious.

A successful performance depends upon the persona accurately communicating the appropriate answering role, the audience accurately perceiving that role, and the audience enacting that role. Failure by either the persona or the audience results in an unsuccessful performance. For example, the audience may not understand an interviewer's question or a comedian's joke. Or the audience finds the situation unnatural and refuses to participate.

Para-social interaction occurs within the individual. It is an intrapersonal process. When the persona asks, or demands, that the spectator enact an answering role, the spectator must decide if he or she is comfortable in that role. Is that role compatible with that individual's perception of self? The spectator must decide if the projected self-role of the persona is compatible with his or her normal self-role. Horton and Wohl (1956) "conjecture that the probability of rejection of the proffered role will be greater the less closely the spectator 'fits' the role prescription" (p. 220). In other words, if the spectator closely resembles the role demanded by the persona, the more likely the spectator will accept the answering role.

In summary, para-social interaction is an imagined relationship between an audience member and a media personality known as a persona. The persona is a media-generated personality projecting the image of someone in an interpersonal relationship with the viewer. Those television programs which concentrate on a single individual, a one-man or one-woman show, encourage para-social interaction. In order

for para-social interaction to occur, the viewer must be willing first, to adapt to the persona and, second, accept the answering role the persona has prescribed.

Para-social interaction has been examined empirically. These investigations have taken place under the theoretical auspices of the uses and gratifications approach to mass media. The next section describes the assumptions of the uses and gratifications approach.

### **Uses and Gratification Approach to Mass Media**

The uses and gratifications approach to the study of mass media communication "seeks to explain the role of the mass media for the individuals and the society from the perspective of the consumer" (Rubin and Rubin, 1985, p. 36). The television viewer, the radio listener, and the newspaper or magazine reader are assumed to choose from the various mass media to fulfill their felt needs. Mass media use is predicated on personal choice. The individual viewer, listener, or reader initiates the communication event.

McQuail and Windahl (1981) distinguish between the traditional effects approach and the uses and gratifications approach to the study of mass media: "instead of studying what the media do with people, let us study what people do with the media" (p. 75). The primary focus of uses and gratifications is personal choice. Program content is secondary. This emphasis on the individual is clarified by the basic assumptions of the uses and gratifications model. The assumptions are enumerated by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974).

1. The audience is conceived of as active,  
that is, an important part of the mass  
media use is assumed to be goal-directed.
2. In the mass communication process much  
media initiative in linking need gratification

- and choice lies with the audience member.
3. The media compete with other sources of need satisfaction.
  4. Methodologically speaking, many of the goals of mass media use can be derived from data supplied by individual audience members themselves. (Self-reporting is acceptable.)
  5. Value judgements about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms.
- (pp. 21-22)

The first assumption maintains that the foundation of the uses and gratifications perspective rests on the individual as an active, goal-directed, and choice-making participant in the mass media communication process. The individual viewer, listener, or reader cannot be influenced by a medium or its content without having actively chosen to use the medium to fulfill some felt need. This emphasis on the individual audience leads Windahl (1981) to describe the uses and gratifications model as a model of the "receiving process" rather than a model of the mass communication process (p. 176).

The second assumption maintains that the individual chooses mass media in an attempt to be gratified or satisfy some felt need. The individual must also determine if he or she has received gratification after using that media. This assumption forces the researcher to look to the receiver for the 'effect' as opposed to searching for media-determined effects. The choice of medium and degree of need gratification lie within the individual.

The third assumption maintains that a mass medium, such as television, is only one of many sources of need satisfaction. Each mass medium competes with other

mass media. Each mass medium also competes with non-mass media sources of need satisfaction, such interaction with other people. An individual may choose to read a newspaper, watch a television program, or simply ask an individual a question to satisfy a need to be informed, for example.

The fourth assumption is an extension of the first assumption. The first assumption maintains that the uses and gratifications approach is audience-centered. In order to determine needs, uses, and gratifications, it is best to go to the source of these phenomena. The source of these phenomena is the individual. The individual is motivated by his or her personal needs. The individual selects the mass medium which he or she feels will satisfy his or her personal needs. The individual determines whether or not the chosen medium served to gratify the need. The sole source of information concerning needs, uses, and gratifications is the individual viewer, listener, or reader.

The fifth assumption narrows the focus of the uses and gratifications approach. From the uses and gratification perspective, research is concerned with the impact of the mass media on the individual. The cultural significance of mass communication, as described in writings about popular culture, for example, is considered to be outside the realm of this perspective. This assumption provides a criterion for determining the relationship between consumer-oriented research under the uses and gratifications approach and research focusing on the cultural impact of the mass media.

In summary, the uses and gratifications approach to mass media communication focuses on the individual consumer, with cultural significance as a secondary consideration. This approach considers the audience to be active and goal-directed. The individual links his or her personal needs to the gratifications derived from mass media consumption. This individual also provides the data for need gratification. Last, mass media compete with other sources of need satisfaction. The five assumptions provide the foundation for the uses and gratifications approach. The next section discusses audience activity, a concept promulgated by the uses and gratifications approach, and its relationship to para-social interaction.

### **Audience Activity**

The first assumption of the uses and gratifications approach identified the audience, the individual viewer, listener, or reader, as active and goal-directed. This assumption involves the concept known as audience activity. Audience activity refers to a "voluntaristic and selective orientation by audiences toward the communication process" (Levy and Windahl, 1985, p. 110). Previous researchers describe audience activity as dichotomous, either active or passive. However, Blumler (1979) and Levy and Windahl (1984) suggest that audience activity is best conceptualized as variable. The audience displays varying kinds and varying degrees of activity. The audience is always active. The questions to be answered are "In what way is the audience active?" and "To what extent is the audience active?".

Levy and Windahl (1984, 1985) developed a typology of audience activity. The typology is composed of two orthogonal dimensions: a qualitative dimension and a temporal dimension. The qualitative dimension is the audience's orientation toward the communication process. Audience orientation is divided into three nominal values: selectivity, involvement, and utility. Audience selectivity refers to a process of choosing one or more behavioral, perceptual, or cognitive media-related alternatives. Audience involvement refers to how an audience perceives a personal connection with mass media content. It also refers to how the audience psychologically interacts with the medium or messages. Audience utility refers to the use of or anticipating the use of mass communication for psychological or social purposes. The temporal dimension (Blumler, 1979) identifies when the audience activity takes place: before, during, or after exposure to the medium. Cross-tabulating the two dimensions results in a nine cell diagram (See Figure 1). Although all cells are relevant to the broad concept of audience activity, only one is central to para-social interaction.

Para-social interaction occurs in the cell of involvement - during exposure. Levy and Windahl (1985) argue that different types of activity occur at this stage. This



Figure 1

**A Typology of Audience Activity (with some examples)**

<b>COMMUNICATION SEQUENCE</b>			
<b>AUDIENCE ORIENTATION</b>	<b>EXPOSURE</b>		
	<b>Before</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>After</b>
<b>Selectivity</b>	Selective Exposure- seeking	Selective Perception	Selective Recall
<b>Involvement</b>	Anticipation of Exposure	Attention Meaning Creation PSI Identification	Long-Term Identification Fantasizing
<b>Utility</b>	"Coin of Exchange"	Using the gratifications obtained	Topic use Opinion Leadership

From Levy, M.R. & Windahl, S. (1985). The concept of audience activity. In K. E. Rosengren, L. A. Venner, & P. Palmgreen. (Eds.). Media gratifications research (p. 113). Beverly Hills: Sage.

typology lists attention, meaning creation, para-social interaction and identification as examples of involvement during exposure. Using Tagg's (1981) levels of consciousness, Levy and Windahl suggest how para-social interaction can be classified. According to Tagg, there are three levels of consciousness: the subconscious level, the preconscious level, and the structurally conscious level. At the subconscious level, there is a fairly low level of neurological response to message stimuli. Little information processing takes place. For example, people are unaware of a radio or television except as background noise, although they process it at a subconscious level. At the preconscious level, individuals are aware they have been exposed to messages, but are unable to report verbally what they heard. For example, people cannot recall details of a news broadcast they've just watched. At the structurally conscious level, the individual is aware of the message he or she is receiving, attempts to give meaning to the message, and can recall or report what has been witnessed. Based on these levels of involvement, Levy and Windahl (1985) suggest that para-social interaction occurs on either the subconscious or preconscious level.

In summary, para-social interaction can best be described as a form of audience activity. It occurs during exposure to mass media and is measured by the involvement of the individual with that media. Para-social interaction can be characterized as audience involvement either at the subconscious or preconscious level of psychological awareness.

The next section examines specific empirical investigations of para-social interaction.

### **Para-Social Interaction Studies**

Previous empirical investigations focusing on para-social interaction can be divided into four areas: para-social interaction and the opportunity for face-to-face interaction (Corison, 1982; Gregg, 1971; Levy, 1979; Rosengren and Windahl, 1972;

Rosengren, Windahl, Hakasson and Johnsson-Smaragdi, 1976; Rubin, Perse, and Powell, 1985 ), para-social interaction and mass media consumption (Nordlund, 1978; Rosengren and Windahl, 1972; Rosengren, Windahl, Hakasson and Johnsson-Smaragdi, 1976 ), para-social interaction as a gratification sought versus a gratification obtained (Levy and Windahl, 1984; McQuail, Blumler, and Brown, 1972; Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn, 1980), and para-social interaction as it relates to personae, specifically television news figures and news programs (Gregg , 1971; Houlberg, 1984; Levy, 1979; Levy and Windahl, 1984; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980; Rubin, Perse and Powell, 1985; Wenner, 1982). This section describes in detail the empirical research in each of the four areas.

The first area of empirical study involves the relationship between para-social interaction and the opportunity for face-to-face interaction. Corison's (1982) doctoral thesis investigated the relationship between communication avoidance and para-social interaction. Para-social interaction was measured as audience interaction with a persona and interaction with a television program. She found that communication avoidance and para-social interaction possess a significant, positive relationship. However, communication avoidance is not a predictor of para-social interaction. She also found that those who engage in para-social not only have fewer social contacts, but desire more social interaction. The desire for social contact is the best predictor of para-social interaction.

Gregg's (1971) master's thesis sought to determine television use by the socially isolated. Horton and Wohl (1956) hypothesized that the personality program is particularly formatted to para-social relationships with the socially isolated. Gregg examined television viewing by persons over 60 years, and their tendency toward para-social interaction. Like Corison (1982), Gregg concluded that socially isolated, older persons had a greater tendency toward para-social interaction than socially integrated, older persons.

Levy (1979) investigated para-social interaction, social interaction, and a

specific type of programming, television news. He surveyed a random sample of 240 adults to test hypotheses relating para-social interaction to opportunities for social interaction and the amount of television news viewed. Para-social interaction was measured by a Likert-type scale composed of seven propositions. Opportunities for social interaction was measured in two ways. First, an index of gregariousness based on a respondent's total number of friendships and membership in voluntary organizations was established. Second, respondents were asked if they watched television alone or with someone else. The amount of television news consumed was determined by comparing the number of times subjects watched local and network news as compared to their total television program consumption. "High," "medium," and "low" television news consumption categories were developed (p. 71).

Like Gregg (1971) and Corison (1982), Levy found the opportunities for social interaction are inversely related to para-social interaction. He also found a strong negative correlation between education and para-social interaction. Levy suggests that the more education a person has, the broader his or her social network becomes. The broader the social network, the more opportunities the individual has for social interaction, and the less motivation for para-social interaction.

Age was also found to have a significant positive correlation with para-social interaction. Levy suggests that the decrease in social contacts as one ages might explain this relationship.

Rosengren and Windahl (1972) sought to determine the relationship between para-social interaction and interaction potential, actual interaction, and the amount of mass media consumed. In this study, Rosengren and Windahl also introduce a typology of relations to link the audience with actors of the mass media. Their typology of relations is comprised of two dimensions: interaction and identification. These dimensions describe the relationship between individuals and one or more media actors. Interaction is defined as imaginary, mutual stimulation and response, not to be confused with actual interpersonal interaction where stimulation and response are real.

Identification is defined as "imagining oneself to be in the place of another person" (p. 172). Identification can be described as a form of empathy. Identification, in this form, is shallow and temporary. As Figure 2 shows, four potential types of relations result from the Rosengren and Windahl typology: detachment, para-social interaction, solitary identification, and capture.

Detachment occurs when the media user neither interacts nor identifies with a media actor. The media user simply watches the performance of an actor. Para-social interaction occurs when the media user interacts with a media actor as if the actor is present. The media user does not lose his or her personal identity. For example, an individual watches a talk show host as if the host is a real person in the room with the individual.

Solitary identification is described as "identification without interaction" (Rosengren and Windahl, 1972, p. 173). This type of relation is thought to be virtually non-existent. Some sort of interaction is a necessary prerequisite for identification. However, some media actors may dominate a program to such a great extent, as in a one-person show, that solitary identification could be a potential outcome. Capture occurs when the media user both interacts and identifies with the media actor. Rosengren and Windahl used the four relations to describe the values of a variable they call *degree of involvement*. This variable is an early description of "involvement" used in the Levy and Windahl (1985) typology of audience activity (See Figure 1).

Rosengren and Windahl sought to discover relationships among the degree of involvement, the *degree of dependence* (which is "theoretically defined as individual and environmental possibilities to interact face-to-face with real human beings" (p. 183)), the *amount of media consumption* (which was measured by hours per week spent with each of four media radio, television, newspaper, and magazines), and the *amount of actual interaction* (defined by the number of contacts on the job and with friends). The *potential for human interaction* was measured by status (sex and education), means and opportunities (having a car or more than average leisure time) and partner (having a job

Figure 2

**TPOLOGY OF RELATIONS**

<b>Interaction (imaginary)</b>		
<b>I d e n t i f i c a t i o n</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>YES</b>
	<b>NO</b>	<b>YES</b>
	Detachment	Para-Social Interaction
	Solitary Identification	Capture

**From Rosengren, K.E., & Windahl, S. (1972). Mass media consumption as a functional alternative. In D. McQuail (Ed.). Sociology of mass communications (p. 173). Middlesex, England: Penguin.**

and being married).

Using survey data from Swedish adults, Rosengren and Windahl found a clear relationship between interaction potential and degree of involvement: the lower the potential for human interaction, the higher the degree of involvement with mass media as compared to persons with higher interaction potentials. A high interaction potential is related to a low degree of mass media involvement, supporting the findings of other studies.

Rosengren, Windahl, Hakansson and Johnson-Smaragd (1976) expanded on the Rosengren and Windahl Typology of Relations. They suggested that the four types of relations (detachment, para-social interaction, solitary identification, and capture) might function not only as dependent variables resulting from interaction potential, but also may serve as independent variables in which one could lead to another. For example, short-term capture might lead to long-term identification. They sought to develop valid and reliable measures for para-social interaction, capture, and long-term identification. They further tested to determine if the findings of Rosengren and Windahl (1972) are applicable to adolescents.

In an attempt to develop valid and reliable measures, Rosengren et al. compile a list of twenty-one items to measure para-social interaction, capture, and long-term identification. Four hundred Swedish children ten and fifteen years old kept a television diary for a week. They responded to the twenty-one item questionnaire the following week about television in general and two programs they had personally seen the previous week.

The scales were determined to be reliable. The para-social interaction scale has an overall average alpha of .77. The capture scale has an overall average alpha of .81. The long-term identification scale has an overall average alpha of .69.

Using four validity criteria advanced by Campbell and Riske (1959), Rosengren et al. determine that the para-social interaction scale and the long-term identification scale are valid, with the para-social interaction scale having the greater validity. Though

the capture scale did not meet all four validity criteria, it did possess higher reliability and should not be completely rejected. They concluded that the para-social interaction and long-term identification scales could be used with confidence in future research.

The final question Rosengren et al. attempted to answer is whether the relationships discovered in previous research concerning para-social interaction in adults are applicable to adolescents. Do children utilize television as a functional alternative to interpersonal interaction? They found that adults and children do differ. They found no correlation between interaction potential, actual interaction, and para-social interaction among the children surveyed. They note that the original theoretical framework developed by Rosengren and Windahl (1972) for adults is not applicable to adolescents. For example, Rosengren et al. (1976) suggest that "[f]or adolescents, television may be less of a functional alternative to action interaction than has been demonstrated to be for adults" (p. 360).

Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) examined para-social interaction as it relates to loneliness and instrumental television news usage. In this study, para-social interaction was treated as an outcome, a product of television viewing. It may also be treated as an attitude toward future media use. Loneliness was conceptualized "as a discrepancy between the amount of interaction individuals need and the amount of interaction that they perceive is fulfilled" (p. 158). Rubin et. al. hypothesize that loneliness is positively related to para-social interaction with a favorite television personality. They further hypothesized that a positive relationship between para-social interaction and television reliance exists. Instrumental television use, selective use for goal-directed purposes such as seeking information (Rubin and Rubin, 1985), was also predicted to be positively related to para-social interaction.

Focusing on local news viewing, Rubin et al. surveyed college students. A para-social interaction scale was developed based on prior research. The study found that lonely persons depend more on television than on interpersonal communication. However, loneliness does not lead to para-social interaction. On the other hand,



para-social interaction and television reliance are significantly and positively related. Para-social interaction is positively related to the instrumental use of local television news. Two additional findings were that the history and amount of local news viewing are not significant factors leading to para-social interaction.

This first area of empirical study focuses on the relationship between para-social interaction and the opportunity for face-to-face interaction. The review of research finds that persons who have few social contacts and a low potential for human interaction have a greater tendency to engage in para-social interaction. The socially isolated also demonstrate a tendency toward para-social interaction. Education is inversely related to para-social interaction, while age is positively related. And although loneliness is not related to para-social interaction, reliance on television shows a positive relationship. Finally, these research findings do not apply to children's television viewing.

The second area of empirical study involves the relationship between para-social interaction and an individual's amount of media consumption. There is no consensus of research demonstrating that para-social interaction is positively related to increased media consumption. Nordlund (1978) found that the more people are exposed to a medium, except for newspapers, the greater the tendency for media interaction. Media interaction refers to

*one of several ways ... the consumer can develop a growing interest in, experience various forms of interaction with, and at certain levels, strongly identify with, persons and characters appearing in the mass media.*

*(p. 150)*

In this case, media interaction subsumes para-social interaction. It covers a broader range of involvement than just para-social interaction.

Rosengren and Windahl (1972) found a significant association between an individual's amount of mass media consumption and his or her degree of involvement, which includes para-social interaction. Rosengren, Windahl, Hakansson, and Johnsson-Smaragdi (1976) discovered weak and non-existent correlations between adolescents' para-social interaction and media consumption. No definite relationship exists. The amount of time spent with television, radio, newspapers, and magazines does not seem to affect para-social interaction.

The third area of empirical study involves the relationship between para-social interaction and gratifications-sought versus gratifications-obtained. A series of studies (Levy and Windahl, 1984; McQuail, Blumler, and Brown, 1972; Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn, 1980) sought to determine the relationship between gratifications sought or expected by an individual and the gratifications that the individual obtained by using mass media. Para-social interaction represents a dimension of gratifications sought and gratifications obtained.

McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972) integrated para-social interaction into a typology of television viewer gratifications. They suggest that "media use is suitably characterized as an interactive process, relating media content, individual needs, perceptions, roles, and values and the social context which a person is situated" (p. 144). In this early study, gratifications sought and gratifications obtained were not differentiated. In response to the narrow view of television only as a channel of escape, McQuail et al. sought to differentiate among different forms of television gratification. Examining British viewer habits, McQuail et al. identify categories of gratification. Those categories are as follows:

1. Diversion
  - (a) Escape from the constraints of routine
  - (b) Escape from the burdens of problems
  - (c) Emotional release
2. Personal Relationships

- (a) Companionship
- (b) Social utility
- 3. Personal Identity
  - (a) Personal reference
  - (b) Reality exploration
  - (c) Value reinforcement
- 4. Surveillance.

(p. 155)

The second category of the gratification typology is related specifically to para-social interaction. "Personal relationships" is divided into two gratification types. The first type, "companionship," is described as "a process whereby the audience member enters into a vicarious relationship with media personalities" (p. 157). McQuail et al. go on to say that this vicarious relationship is the same as Horton and Wohl's (1956) para-social relationship. The "social utility" category is described as a broad category referring to media use for conversational material, as a subject of conversation in itself, or as a social event for the family or friends. The McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972) typology of gratifications is preliminary in nature. It established a foundation for future gratifications research.

Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn (1980) were interested in the nature of the relationship between a specific gratification sought and its corresponding gratification obtained. They also sought to determine if the dimensions of gratifications sought from a particular program type or medium are the same dimensions for gratifications obtained. Palmgreen, et al. established five gratification dimensions.

- 1. General information seeking
- 2. Decisional utility
- 3. Entertainment
- 4. Interpersonal utility
- 5. Para-social interaction.

(p. 169)

The "para-social interaction" dimension refers specifically to Horton and Wohl's (1956) concept of face-to-media interaction.

On the basis of television news viewing, Palmgreen et al. (1980) found that "individual gratifications sought were moderately to strongly related to corresponding gratifications obtained" (p. 183). Further, the degree of dependence (Rosengren and Windahl, 1982) on a particular program was found to be related to the relationship between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained. The stronger the relationship between gratifications sought-obtained, the greater will be the dependence on a particular program. Those who focus on single programs for their gratification are said less aware of functional alternatives, other sources of gratifications.

In examining the relationship between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained, Palmgreen et al. (1980) found that entertainment and para-social interaction have a mixed relationship. As dimensions of gratifications sought, entertainment and para-social interaction are independent. As dimensions of gratifications obtained, entertainment and para-social interaction are strongly related. Several explanations are suggested for this. Palmgreen et al. explain that different sociopsychological processes account for the independence of these two dimensions, entertainment and para-social interaction, as gratifications sought. As a gratification obtained, the structure of television news with video taped reports and the attempt to make the news announcers "people you know" provides entertainment and a channel for para-social interaction. The specific nonverbal cues of the correspondents provide entertainment, as well as influence para-social interaction. In summary, seeking entertainment and seeking para-social interaction are independent motivations for watching television news. Receiving entertainment and experiencing para-social interaction from television news are not independent. As gratifications obtained they are linked as a result of the structure of television news programs.

Levy and Windahl (1984) sought to determine possible associations between

audience activity and gratifications sought and obtained. They identified three levels of audience activity. Preactivity is audience activity before exposure to the mass media, duractivity is audience activity during exposure to the mass media, and postactivity is audience activity after exposure to mass media. Activity levels were then associated with gratifications sought, gratifications obtained, and exposure (See Figure 3).

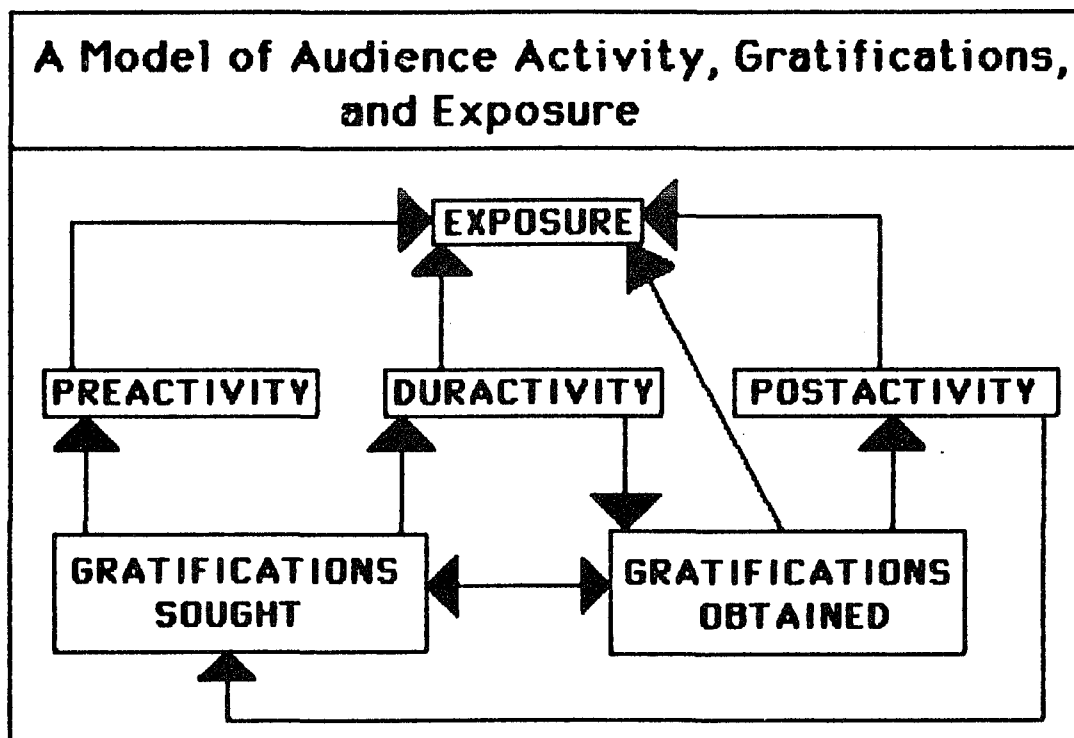
Performing a factor analysis on gratifications sought and obtained from a study of television news in Sweden, Levy and Windahl found three factors. The three factors are: Factor One Entertainment - Para-social Interaction, Factor Two Surveillance, and Factor Three Interpersonal Utility. These factors are roughly equivalent to the factors McQuail et al. (1972) and Palmgreen et al. (1980) identify.

All three factors are strongly related to the preactivity phase of audience activity. The duractivity variable reflects a different relationship with gratifications sought. Duractivity has some correlation with the entertainment - para-social interaction factor. A weak, but significant relationship exists between duractivity and interpersonal utility. Similar relationships are found for duractivity and gratifications obtained. No significant relationship between duractivity and surveillance exists.

For gratifications obtained and postactivity, there are significant correlations. The correlation between interpersonal utility and post exposure activity is comparatively stronger than the two other gratifications obtained factors.

The research focusing on gratifications sought and gratifications obtained demonstrates a relationship to para-social interaction. Para-social interaction is treated as a gratification sought and as a gratification obtained. Para-social interaction appears to serve as an independent gratification sought. However, research finds that it possesses a relationship with entertainment as a gratification obtained. This relationship is explained by the common characteristics of para-social interaction and vicarious interaction (Horton and Strauss, 1957). This concludes the third area of empirical study.

The final area of empirical study involves para-social interaction as it relates to personae, specifically television news figures and news programs. Horton and Wohl

**Figure 3**

From Levy, M. R. & Windahl, S. (1984). Audience activity and gratifications: a conceptual clarification and exploration. Communication Research, 11, 59.

(1956) identify news announcers or interviewers as individuals who might serve as personae in a para-social interaction. Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) note that

[n]ewscasts, whether local or network, present carefully created personae trained to exhibit qualities necessary for the development of parasocial interaction...

(p. 161)

A number of investigations focus on this particular program type. These studies differ in their emphasis on television news programs and television news personae. Levy (1979) and Levy and Windahl (1984) examine television news viewing in general. Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn (1980) and Wenner (1982) concentrate on para-social interaction and network news programs, while Houlberg (1984) and Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) investigate para-social interaction and local television news viewing. The findings of these studies are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Television newscasters serve as the imaginary partner in para-social interaction research. Gregg (1971), McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972), Nordlund (1978), and Rosengreg and Windahl (1972) all identified television news viewing as a use and a gratification in the realm of para-social interaction along with other types of television programs. Levy (1979) investigated opportunities for social interaction and the amount of television news watched as they relate to para-social interaction with the news program and the news persona. He found that "para-social interaction with news personae is a common feature of the audience experience with television news" (p. 72). People do engage in varying degrees of para-social interaction with television news personae. Para-social interaction with news personae serves as a determinant of the amount of television news consumed. Levy also noted that network commentators are "likely to provide interaction on a cognitive level" (p. 74). Levy did not differentiate between para-social interaction with network commentators and para-social interaction with local commentators.

Levy and Windahl (1984) sought to clarify audience activity and gratifications using patterns of media use specific to television news. Para-social interaction is described as a form of audience involvement during exposure to mass media. Audience involvement is operationally defined "as the degree to which individual's either attend to the communication situation or engage in information processing vis-à-vis messages presented" (p. 63). They found weak, but significant correlations between para-social interaction, as a gratification sought and a gratification obtained, and audience activity of watching television news. Levy and Windahl did not distinguish between para-social interaction with news programs and para-social interaction with news personae.

While some studies examine television news viewing in general, others focus on network television viewing. Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn (1980) investigated the relationship between gratifications sought and obtained from network evening news programs. The three network evening news programs from ABC, CBS, and NBC were examined. Para-social interaction is identified as a gratification dimension. As a dimension of gratifications sought, para-social interaction is an independent motive for watching television network news. As a dimension of gratifications obtained, para-social interaction is associated with entertainment.

Wenner (1982) investigated gratifications sought and gratifications obtained in relation to network evening news programs and the news magazine program "60 Minutes." The items used to identify gratifications sought and gratifications obtained are the same as Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn's (1980), with the exclusion of items describing the general information dimension. The para-social interaction dimension is included. The correlation between para-social interaction gratifications sought and gratifications obtained for the "most watched" network evening news program is substantial and significant (mean  $r = .65$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The same correlation between para-social gratifications sought and para-social gratifications obtained for "60 Minutes" is strong and significant (mean  $r = .49$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In a comparison of gratifications obtained for the "most watched" network evening news and gratifications obtained for



"60 Minutes," again, a strong correlation is found (mean  $r = .53$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Other studies of television news and para-social interaction focus on local television news viewing. Houliberg (1984) sought to discover empirical evidence of para-social interaction between local newscasters and their television audience. This study specifically asked questions to individuals concerning their view of the newscasters themselves. Previous studies did not specify the persona, but focus instead on television news viewing in general. Using telephone interviews, Houliberg asked individuals to identify or describe a local newscaster who is more interesting to them than other local newscasters. Those who were able to sufficiently identify a local newscaster are asked a series of questions concentrating on para-social, professional, and physical attributes of the newscaster.

Houliberg found para-social interaction to be a strong factor explaining 26.7 percent of the total factor variance. He also found that formal education makes a difference in the respondents' viewing behavior between those who can and cannot name or describe a local newscaster. Respondents naming a newscaster have more formal education. He did not investigate the tendency toward para-social interaction for those who cannot name a local newscaster. Houliberg found that para-social interaction when mixed with professional and physical attributes of local television newscasters account for 47.6 percent of total factor variance.

Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) investigated the relationship among loneliness, para-social interaction, and local television news viewing. They developed a reliable measure for para-social interaction using college students. Para-social interaction is also positively associated with perceived realism of television news and the use of local television news for information reasons. Finally, concerning the nature of audience activity, para-social interaction with local television news viewing is part of instrumental television use.

The final area of empirical study focuses on para-social interaction as it relates to personae, specifically television news figures and news programs. The research

demonstrates that people do engage in para-social interaction while watching television news programs. Para-social interaction is a determinant for the amount of television news consumed. As a gratification sought and a gratification obtained, para-social interaction is related to watching television news. Studies using television news personae are not consistent in terms of local and network newscasters. This concludes the final area of empirical study.

In conclusion, previous empirical investigations focusing on para-social interaction can be divided into four areas: para-social interaction and the opportunity for face-to-face interaction, para-social interaction and mass media consumption, para-social interaction as a gratification sought versus a gratification obtained, and para-social interaction as it relates to personae, specifically television news figures and news programs. These studies demonstrate the existence of para-social interaction.

Only one study examines a relationship between a specific interpersonal communication variable and para-social interaction (Corison, 1982). The next section explores an interpersonal communication concept known as rhetorical sensitivity and demonstrates its centrality to the concept of para-social interaction.

### **Rhetorical Sensitivity**

This section defines rhetorical sensitivity as a communication construct, discusses the development of a rhetorical sensitivity measure known as the RHETSEN II Scale, and demonstrates the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity.

Rhetorical sensitivity is an interpersonal communication concept which Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) define as "a particular attitude toward encoding spoken messages" (p. 2). Rhetorically sensitive persons have a particular understanding of communication which they use as a foundation for their communication behavior.

Rhetorical sensitivity refers to an attitude, not a behavioral guideline. Hart et al.

**observe**

**It [rhetorical sensitivity] represents a way of thinking about what should be said and, then a way of deciding how to say it.**

**Rhetorical sensitivity is not a behavioral guideline for measuring one's interpersonal competence but a mind-set which persons apply usefully in their everyday lives.**

**(p. 2)**

**Although it influences interpersonal communication, rhetorical sensitivity functions at the intrapersonal level.**

**Hart and Burks (1972) describe the rhetorically sensitive person as one who**

- 1. tries to accept role-taking as part of the human condition (because social interactants are multi-faceted),**
- 2. attempts to avoid stylized behavior (because the outcomes of social interactions are unpredictable),**
- 3. is characteristically willing to undergo the strain of adaptation (because social interactions bring different people together in an atmosphere of flux),**
- 4. seeks to distinguish between all information and information acceptable for communication (because the Other is a primary constraint on communicative thinking), and**
- 5. tries to understand that an idea can be**

rendered in multi-form ways (because ideas themselves do not prescribe forms of verbalization).

(pp. 76-88)

The rhetorically sensitive person is one who accepts role-taking, avoids stylized behavior, is willing to adapt, distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable information for communication, and understands that ideas can be expressed in a variety of different ways.

An individual can possess, for example, a high degree of acceptance to role-taking or a low degree of willingness to adapt. This leads Darnell and Brockriede (1976) to describe rhetorical sensitivity as a continuum. An individual may possess more or less rhetorical sensitivity. Those persons who are extremely rhetorically sensitive lie at one end of the continuum. These people are classified as rhetorical reflectors. Darnell and Brockriede suggest that rhetorical reflectors represent pluralism gone wild. They have no self to call their own. For each person and for each situation, they present a new self. The communication choices they make arise from the perceived needs and wishes of the other person. Rhetorical reflectors neither initiate monologue nor dialogue. They control inasmuch as they try to get another person to take control of the conversation. By knowing the situation, the norms of the other person, and presuming the rhetorical reflector would respond to the other person and the situation without consideration of self, the behavior of the rhetorical reflector is predictable. The rhetorical reflector possesses an extremely high degree of rhetorical sensitivity.

On the opposite side of the continuum are those people who possess a low degree of rhetorical sensitivity. These people are classified as noble selves. Darnell and Brockriede describe the noble selves as having a unitary view of self. The self is the primary basis for making communication choices. They want to control. Noble selves disdain shared choices. They would rather engage in monologue than dialogue. The communicative choices of the noble selves are almost automatic, making them highly

**predictable.**

**Between the rhetorical reflectors and the noble selves lie those persons with moderate rhetorical sensitivity. Darnell and Brockriede designate these people as rhetorical sensitives. The rhetorical sensitives have a "repertoire of selves" (Hart and Burks, 1972, p. 79). These people have a collection of selves from which to select and, unlike the rhetorical reflector, do not destroy each self when approached with a new situation. The rhetorical sensitives make communication choices based on a blend of perspectives. They engage in shared choices based on the chosen self and the other person. This merging of perspectives becomes a transaction, and transactions are highly unpredictable.**

**These three classifications, the rhetorical reflector, the noble self, and the rhetorical sensitive, provide identification points along the continuum for persons possessing different levels of rhetorical sensitivity.**

**The next section discusses the development of the measure of rhetorical sensitivity know as the RHETSEN II.**

## **RHETSEN and RHETSEN II**

**Based on the theoretical foundation of Hart and Burks (1972) and Darnell and Brockriede (1976), researchers developed an instrument to measure rhetorical sensitivity. An initial rhetorical sensitivity scale, RHETSEN, was developed by Hart, Eadie, and Carlson (1975). The initial version of the RHETSEN scale is used to classify relational types and develop a typology for enduring relationships (Fitzpatrick, 1976) and to investigate prison inmate interest in communication (McKee, 1977). Craig, Johnson, and Miller (1977) find that the rhetorically sensitive person is viewed as "more similar in attitudes, but less physically and socially attractive. They suggest that the RHETSEN scale suffered from structural problems and needed improvement.**

**Carlson (1978) and Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) correct the conceptual**

and empirical failings of the initial RHETSEN scale and develop the RHETSEN II. They note that the RHETSEN II "is more a measure of interpersonal ideology than an inventory of enacted behaviors" (p. 21). The RHETSEN II scale incorporates the classification concepts of Darnell and Brockriede (1976). Three internal scales measure the rhetorical reflector, the noble self, and the rhetorical sensitive. The three scores of each internal scale, when compared to their respective cut-off scores, yield a composite description of an individual on the rhetorical sensitivity continuum.

Carlson (1978) empirically investigates the three classifications. He finds the rhetorical reflector to have "little, if any, feelings of self-sovereignty [and] believe[s] in external control of self" (p. 132). Females appear to be more reflective than males. The noble self also follows along the lines described by Brockriede and Darnell (1976). The noble self has a "unitary view of self [and] seem[s] closed-minded, impervious to demands of the situations" (p. 130). Both rhetorical reflectiveness and noble selfness seem to decrease with the first two years of higher education.

In contrast, the first two years of higher education seem to increase one's level of rhetorical sensitivity. The rhetorical sensitive demonstrates "a degree of open-mindedness [and] concern for situational considerations" (p. 135). The rhetorical sensitive does show concern for the other as long as this concern does not infringe upon the self.

Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) seek to find if there is a relationship between communicative attitudes and actual behavior. Surveying undergraduate nursing students, they find that "rhetorically sensitive nurses [are] paragons, tending sensitively to the needs of patients, peers, and supervisors alike" (p. 10). They conclude that rhetorically sensitive attitudes have behavioral consequences.

Various studies use the RHETSEN II scale. Dowling and Bliss (1984) utilize the RHETSEN II scale to differentiate between outstanding and failing undergraduate communication disorder clinicians. They find no significant difference between outstanding and failing clinicians on the basis of rhetorical sensitivity. Kelly (1981)

investigates rhetorical sensitivity in relation to the rhetoric of accounts. Accounting behavior "explain[s] our actions to others as we go about doing the things we do" (p. 1). She finds respondents who are classified as rhetorically sensitive (as opposed to noble self and rhetorical reflector) use a rhetoric of accounts significantly more often than other respondents.

McCallister (1981) and Rybacki (1983) examine the relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and verbal behavior. Using simulated superior-subordinate reprimand situations, McCallister finds that all three classifications, noble self, rhetorical reflector, and rhetorically sensitive, adapt their communication behavior to "fit" the situation. However, each type differs in the way each adapts to the situation. Rybacki, using decision making groups, finds that individuals differing in their degree of rhetorical sensitivity did manifest differences in their verbal behavior. Further, rhetorical sensitivity can explain those differences.

Schoen (1981) investigates the rhetorical sensitivity scores of college students enrolled in a basic speech course. The RHETSEN II scores of rhetorically sensitives increase over the period of the course. Rhetorical reflectors and noble selves scores decrease. This reaffirms Carlson's (1978) conclusion that extreme RHETSEN scores decrease in the first two years of higher education. Sullivan (1983) uses the RHETSEN II scale to test the construct validity of an instrument developed to measure rhetorical competence.

In summary, using the theoretical foundation of Hart and Burks (1972) and Darnell and Brockriede (1976), researchers develop the measure for rhetorical sensitivity. This measure is known as the RHETSEN II Scale. The RHETSEN II has three internal scales: a Noble Self Scale, a Rhetorical Reflector Scale, and a Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale. Previous research demonstrates the scales to be reliable and valid (Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, 1980). The next section discusses the characteristic similarities between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity.

### Para-social Interaction and Rhetorical Sensitivity

Para-social interaction is related, but not isomorphic, to personal interaction. Para-social interaction lacks feedback from the receiver and is an illusion of intimacy created in the mind of the receiver. In terms of mass media communication, para-social interaction is an intrapersonal phenomenon. The characteristics of rhetorical sensitivity reflect this relationship between para-social interaction and personal interaction.

The first characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity is that the rhetorically sensitive individual tries to accept role-taking as natural. Hart and Burke (1972) treat the individual as a *collection* of behaviors and not a single entity. Gumpert and Cathcart (1978) argue that successful interpersonal communication depends on the individual "being able to enact roles which are appropriate to the situation (p.420). In vicarious interaction, as in watching a dramatic performance, the audience is assumed to take "successive roles and deeper empathic involvements in the leading roles" (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 218). In contrast, para-social interaction has the persona prescribe an appropriate answering role for the individual viewer. Accepting this role is a voluntary and independent choice for the individual. The individual "retains control over the content of his participation" (p. 219). Para-social interaction differs from personal interaction in reciprocity. There is no transaction in para-social interaction. In vicarious interaction, the individual viewer tends to surrender control through identification with the characters and their roles. These distinctions lead to the conclusion that the more rhetorically sensitive a person is, the greater his or her tendency to accept an answering role prescribed by a persona. The reverse may also be true. One who is less willing to accept role-taking as part of the human condition may not be willing to accept a persona's answering role. Rhetorical sensitivity and para-social interaction share the characteristic of role enactment in common.

The second characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity is that the rhetorically sensitive individual avoids stylized verbal behavior. This characteristic is related to the



feedback inherent in interpersonal communication, making the characteristic unique to social interaction. Where verbal behavior by the audience is an expectedly rare occurrence in para-social interaction, stylized verbal behavior stems from the role chosen by the individual. Hart and Burks (1972) explain that the rhetorically sensitive person "understands that his roles or social selves will often times be at odds with another" (p. 79). They further note that an individual who chooses to continually display the same role "will be rhetorically unproductive and interpersonally naive" (p. 79). This is an accurate description of the persona, rather than the television viewer. One of the functions of the persona is to maintain a consistency of character. The rhetorically sensitive person uses all of the roles available. He or she may even choose to exhibit a contradictory as well as an accommodating role given different situations. This characteristic suggests that the persona does not possess a high degree of rhetorical sensitivity. It also suggests that the viewer who is less rhetorically sensitive may exhibit stylized behavior and not adapt to the persona.

The third characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity is that the rhetorically sensitive person is willing to undergo the strain of adaptation. With the flux inherent in social interactions, people should be ready to make on-the-spot changes in the roles they assume. "In order for communication to be achieved at all, some adaptation is necessary in any interaction" (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 219). This includes para-social interaction. Again the persona asks the audience to adapt to and accept the appropriate role. In order for para-social interaction to exist, some degree of audience adaptation is necessary. An individual may reject the role offered by the persona. He or she may criticize or disagree with the persona. Horton and Wohl point out that "the functions of the program ... are not served by the mere perception of it, but by the role-enactment that completes it" (p. 219). Rhetorical sensitivity and para-social interaction share this characteristic in common.

The fourth characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity is that the rhetorically sensitive person seeks to distinguish between all information and information acceptable for

communication. Hart and Burks (1972) note that "[i]n instrumental communication, we engage persons in dialogue because in some fashion they are important to us" (p. 86). Persons who use mass media to serve their para-social needs assume that the persona has already decided what is and what is not important to communicate. For example, the newscaster has already decided what makes up "the important news of the day." Hart and Burks point out that "intrapersonal communication is not isomorphic to interpersonal communication" (p. 86). So in the case of para-social interaction, since the receiver has no input into the transaction, this characteristic may be reworded to say that the para-socially sensitive person feels the information that the persona is sending is acceptable for communication.

The final characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity is that the rhetorically sensitive person understands that an idea can be rendered in multi-form ways. This characteristic is similar to avoiding stylized verbal behavior in that it is related to the feedback aspect of the interpersonal communication process. Of course, feedback by the viewer is impossible in a para-social relationship. This characteristic is also an extension of the fourth characteristic. The information acceptable for communication can be presented in a variety of different ways. In terms of understanding, Horton and Wohl (1956) explain the potential for communication breakdown if the audience cannot respond correctly.

A spectator who fails to make the anticipated responses will find himself further and further removed from the base-line of common understanding. One would expect the 'error' to be cumulative, and eventually to be carried, perhaps, to the point at which the spectator is forced to resign in confusion, disgust, anger, or boredom.

(p. 221)

This can occur, for example, when a comedian is misunderstood and continues to fail to

get the jokes across to his audience. The individual who possesses a high degree of rhetorical sensitivity is forgiving of the comedian who is confusing or a newscaster who makes a mistake. The individual with a lower degree of rhetorical sensitivity is less forgiving when it comes to the inaccuracy in sending a message.

In summary, the five characteristics of rhetorical sensitivity are couched in interpersonal communication. Role-taking and adaptation are characteristics in common with para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. The characteristics of stylized behavior, acceptable information, and multi-form idea expression are related to the feedback and encoding aspects of rhetorical sensitivity. These aspects do not have precise counterparts in para-social interaction. The persona exhibits consistent behavior, is in control of sending all of the information, and is also in control of how the messages will be sent. These characteristics apply more to the success or failure of the persona to accurately project his or her role, than to the individual television viewer.

The next section discusses the rationale, research questions, and hypotheses for this study.

### **Rationale, Research Questions, and Hypotheses**

Based on the previous review of literature, para-social interaction is characterized by a willingness to adapt and accept roles prescribed by the persona. The rhetorically sensitive person is one who accepts role taking and is willing to adapt. This similarity of characteristics raises the question: Is there a relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity?

The review of literature also reveals that study of para-social interaction involving television news viewing focuses on local news, network news, and news magazine programs. Comparisons are made between network news and news magazines. However, no previous study investigates the similarities and differences in local and network news viewing on the basis of para-social interaction. This raises the

**question: Is there a difference in para-social interaction between local television news viewing and network news viewing?**

**In order to answer these questions, this study tests hypotheses concerning the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. Para-social interaction requires a certain degree of adaptability and role acceptance. The more rhetorically sensitive an individual is, the more likely he or she is willing to allow the other to control the situation, prescribe the appropriate role and adapt to that role. Since the rhetorical reflector exhibits these characteristics, the following hypotheses are suggested.**

**H1: There is a significant, positive relationship between para-social interaction with local television news viewing and scores on the rhetorical reflector scale.**

**H2: There is a significant, positive relationship between para-social interaction with network television news viewing and scores on the rhetorical reflector scale.**

**Para-social interaction requires a certain degree of adaptability and role acceptance. The more rhetorically sensitive an individual is the more likely he or she will adapt to and accept a prescribed role. Since the noble self is the least rhetorically sensitive type, this individual should not be willing to adapt and has a tendency not to accept role-taking. The following hypotheses are suggested:**

**H3: There is a significant, negative relationship between para-social interaction with local television news and scores on the noble self scale.**

**H4: There is a significant, negative relationship between para-social interaction with network television news and scores on the noble self scale.**

**Para-social interaction requires a certain degree of adaptability and role acceptance. The rhetorically sensitive person is characterized by his willingness to adapt and accept roles. However, he or she does not lose sight of self. The rhetorical sensitive is the best of both extremes. This makes directional prediction difficult. The**

following research questions are suggested:

**RQ1: What is the relationship between para-social interaction with local television news and scores on the rhetorical sensitivity scale?**

**RQ2: What is the relationship between para-social interaction with network television news and scores on the rhetorical sensitivity scale?**

The Para-Social Interaction scale developed by Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) is reliable for measuring para-social interaction inherent in local news viewing. The scale bases para-social interaction on the persona and not general news viewing. It is essentially a scale developed from prior research of both local and network news viewing. It may be a reliable measure for para-social interaction in network news viewing. The following hypotheses are suggested:

**H5: The Rubin, Perse, and Powell Para-Social Interaction Scale is a reliable measure for para-social interaction with network news viewing.**

**H6: The Rubin, Perse, and Powell Para-Social Interaction Scale is a reliable measure for para-social interaction with local news viewing.**

The potential differences between local and network news viewing concerning para-social interaction are overlooked. The structural formats of the local and network news programs differ. For example, local stations use a "news, weather and sports" format while the network news programs use a national-international segmenting. Differences in para-social interaction between local and network news viewing may exist. The following hypothesis is suggested:

**H7: There is a significant difference between para-social interaction with local television news viewing and network news viewing.**

This concludes Chapter Two covering a brief discussion of mass media and interpersonal communication, a description of para-social interaction, a discussion of the uses and gratifications approach to mass communication with an emphasis on audience activity, a review of empirical investigations into para-social interaction, a description of rhetorical sensitivity, a review of the development of the RHETSEN II Scale, the

relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity, and the rationale, research questions, and hypotheses.

The next chapter explains the methodology used to test the hypotheses.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

Research reported in Chapter 2 suggests that a need exists to examine communication variables which may influence audience activity while watching television. Para-social interaction is a type of audience activity. Rhetorical sensitivity is an interpersonal communication variable. The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. This study further examines the reliability of the Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) Para-Social Interaction Scale for measuring para-social interaction associated with network news programs as well as local news programs .

This chapter describes the instrument used for measuring para-social interaction, the instrument used for measuring rhetorical sensitivity, sample and sample size, method of data collection, and statistical procedures. The first section describes the instrument used to measure para-social interaction.

#### Instrument for Measuring Para-Social Interaction

For the purposes of the present study, para-social interaction is defined as *a person's tendency to watch a television newscaster as if he or she is engaged in an interpersonal transaction*. Para-social interaction has been measured by a variety of methods and instruments (Gregg, 1971; Houlberg, 1984; Levy, 1979; Levy and Windahl, 1984; Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn, 1980; Rubin, Perse, and Powell, 1985; Wenner, 1982). Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985) recently developed a 20-item Para-Social Interaction [PSI] Scale to measure an individual's tendency toward para-social interaction with relation to local television news. An individual indicates how each statement applies to himself or herself by choosing one of five responses for each

**statement: Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Rubin, Perse, and Powell note**

**[t]he Para-Social Interaction Scale contains elements of empathy, perceived similarity, and physical attraction. An affinity with television news would foster the empathic and perceived similarity feelings that have been conceptually incorporated within parasocial interaction.**

**(p.174)**

**The Rubin, Perse, and Powell PSI Scale is provided in Appendix A.**

**In their investigation of para-social interaction and loneliness, Rubin, et al. sought to develop a reliable empirical measure for para-social interaction. They used the instrument to measure para-social interaction associated with local television news viewing. After an individual completes the PSI scale, each response is assigned a number value as follows: "Strongly Agree" = 5, "Agree" = 4, "No Opinion" = 3, "Disagree" = 2, "Strongly Disagree" = 1. Rubin et al. report a total mean score is 2.7 with a standard deviation of .68. Using Cronbach's alpha, they also report the reliability of the PSI scale to be .93. A single-factor solution that accounts for 45.7% of the total variance is confirmed by oblique-rotated principal factors analysis according to Rubin, Perse, and Powell.**

**The Rubin, Perse, and Powell Para-Social Interaction Scale is a reliable instrument for measuring para-social interaction associated with local television viewing. The present study uses this scale to measure para-social interaction associated with network as well as local television news viewing. The present study also tests the reliability of the instrument for measuring both news viewing situations. The next section describes the instrument used to measure rhetorical sensitivity.**



### Instrument for Measuring Rhetorical Sensitivity

For the purposes of the present study, rhetorical sensitivity is defined as *a person's tendency to adapt his or her messages taking into account the nature of language, the situation, and the other person in an actual interpersonal encounter*. According to Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980), there are three dimensions of rhetorical sensitivity. The dimension called the noble self characterizes a person with a strong *negative* tendency toward adapting. The rhetorical reflector dimension characterizes a person with a strong *positive* tendency toward adapting. The rhetorical sensitive dimension characterizes a person with a *moderate* tendency toward adapting. He or she is independent but willing to adapt. Rhetorical sensitivity is measured by an instrument developed by Carlson (1978) and Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980). The scale is known as the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale (Final Version), or RHETSEN II, and is composed of 40 items. An individual indicates how each statement applies to himself or herself by choosing one of five responses for each statement: Almost Always True, Frequently True, Sometimes True, Infrequently True, Almost Never True.

The 40-item instrument produces three measures relating to rhetorical sensitivity: the Noble Self Scale, the Rhetorical Reflector Scale, and the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale. When scores from each of these scales are compared, an individual can be classified along the rhetorical sensitivity continuum ranging from the noble self extreme to the rhetorical reflector extreme.

Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) report the mean, standard deviation, and reliability of the three internal scales. The Noble Self Scale is reported to have a mean of 15.1 (standard deviation = 6.3) with a minimum score of zero and a maximum score of 40. The Noble Self Scale is also reported to have a reliability of .80, with a test-retest reliability of .87. The Rhetorical Reflector Scale is reported to have a mean of 7 (standard deviation = 3.8) with a minimum score of zero and a maximum score of 32. The Rhetorical Reflector Scale is also reported to have a reliability of .63, with a

test-retest reliability of .84. The Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale is reported to have a mean of 31.8 (standard deviation = 7.5) with a minimum score of zero and a maximum score of 56. The Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale is also reported to have a reliability of .76, with a test-retest of .84 (Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, 1980). The RHETSEN II is provided in Appendix B. A description of the scoring formula for each scale is provided in Appendix C. The present study uses the RHETSEN II and its subscales to measure an individual's rhetorical sensitivity. The next section describes the sample and the sample size used for this study.

### **Sample and Sample Size**

The sample for the present study was drawn from a student population in a large Southern University. University students were utilized in the development of both the Rubin, Perse, and Powell PSI Scale and the RHETSEN II Scale (Rubin, Perse, and Powell, 1985; Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, 1980).

Henke (1985) notes that university students in the undergraduate years undergo a period of socialization. During this socialization period, the student develops an orientation toward news. She found that university students increase their use of national and international news media with each year in college. She also found that university students' rated importance of national and international news increases with each subsequent year of college.

The sample was drawn from undergraduate students enrolled in communication courses at the University of Texas at Arlington. Using a medium effect size,  $r = .30$ , with a significance level of  $\alpha = .05$ , and a desired power value of .80, Cohen (1969) suggests a sufficient sample size is 68 subjects. One hundred fifty-seven university students were surveyed for this study. This sample size reflects an effective power value of approximately .99.

The next section describes the method used to collect data to test the

hypotheses.

### Method of Data Collection

The method of data collection for the present study involved the design and distribution of a communication survey. First, a communication survey packet was created. The packet was divided into two parts. The first part of the packet, the questionnaire, contained the instructions for completing the questionnaire, general information questions, one PSI Scale for measuring network television news viewing, one PSI Scale for measuring local television news viewing and one RHETSEN II Scale. The general information questions included the social security number, gender, age, and undergraduate classification of the respondent. Both PSI Scales were listed with two additional, independent questions. Before responding to the PSI-network scale, the first question asked the respondent to identify his or her favorite network for national evening news. The second question asked the respondent to identify his or her favorite network newscaster and that newscaster's network affiliation. Before responding to the PSI-local scale, the first question asked the respondent to identify his or her favorite local television news station for local evening news. The second question asked the respondent to identify his or her favorite local television newscaster and that newscaster's local station affiliation.

The second part of the communication survey packet contained answer sheets for the general information questions, the PSI-Network Scale and affiliated questions, the PSI-Local Scale and affiliated questions, and the RHETSEN II.

The order of the three scales was varied in each packet. Both sections, the questionnaire and the answer sheets, were given a corresponding alphanumeric designation. The letter designation served to identify the order of the scales. For example, the letter "T" identified the "RHETSEN II, PSI-Local, PSI-Network" sequence, while the letter "Z" identified the "PSI-Network, PSI-Local, RHETSEN II" sequence. The

number designation served as a respondent identification number. A sample of the communication survey packet is located in Appendix D.

One communication survey packet was distributed to each respondent. The distribution occurred during scheduled morning class meetings during the Spring of 1986. Before distributing the packets, the respondents were assured that their participation was strictly voluntary. They were further assured that their answers would be kept confidential. The respondents were orally reminded to write their responses to questions and statements on the corresponding answer sheets. Each respondent was given thirty minutes to complete the communication survey.

After each group of subjects had completed the communication survey, the respondents were debriefed. They were reassured that their responses would remain confidential. The respondents were thanked for their participation.

The method of data collection involved two procedures. First, a communication survey packet was created. Second, the communication survey packet was distributed to the subjects. The next section describes the statistical procedures performed to test the hypotheses.

### Statistical Procedures

All pertinent data needed to be converted into numerical equivalents. The data generated by the general information portion of the communication survey was converted as follows: For GENDER, "Male" = 1, "Female" = 2; For AGE, "19 and younger" = 1, "20" = 2, "21" = 3, "22" = 4, "23 thru 25" = 5, "26 and older" = 6; For CLASSIFICATION, "Freshman" = 1, "Sophomore" = 2, "Junior" = 3, "Senior" = 4. The social security number served only as a checking mechanism to avoid having the same respondent complete the communication survey more than once.

The data generated by the preference question for network television news was converted as follows: "ABC" = 1, "CBS" = 2, "CNN" = 3, "INN" = 4, "NBC" = 5. The data

generated by the preference question for the local television news was converted as follows: "CBS" = 1, "NBC" = 2, "ABC" = 3, "INDEP-1" = 4, "PBS" = 5, "INDEP-2" = 6, "INDEP-3" = 7, "INDEP-4" = 8, and "INDEP-5" = 9. The data generated by questions concerning the favorite network newscaster, favorite local newscaster, and their respective affiliations were inappropriate for numerical conversion and not needed for additional analysis.

Both the PSI scale for network news and the PSI scale for local news were scored according to the method described in the first section of this chapter.

The RHETSEN II Scale was scored for all three scales: the Noble Self Scale, the Rhetorical Reflector Scale, and the Rhetorical Sensitive Scale. The method used for scoring each of these scales is detailed in Appendix B.

The second procedure was to perform statistical analysis on the data to test the hypotheses. The present study used the SPSS<sup>X</sup> computer program to perform the appropriate statistical procedures. Canonical correlation was performed to test the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. Canonical correlation is a multivariate technique used to describe the relationship of one set of variables to another set of variables. For the purposes of this study, the criterion, or dependent variables included Para-Social Interaction, Local [PSIL] and Para-Social Interaction, Network [PSIN]. The predictor, or independent, variables included Noble Self [NS], Rhetorical Reflector [RR], and Rhetorical Sensitivity [RS].

Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) was used to test the reliability of the PSI-network scale, the PSI-local scale, and the three internal RHETSEN II scales. A t-Test (Williams, 1979) was performed to determine if any significant difference exists between para-social interaction with local television news viewing and para-social interaction with network television news viewing. A t-Test was performed on both the PSI-network scale and the PSI-local scale, respectively, to determine if any significant difference exists between scores due to the distribution sequence.

Past mass communication studies have found that para-social interaction is

related to age and level of education. Using the Pearson product-moment correlation, the relationship between PSIL and AGE and the relationship between PSIN and AGE were examined. Using Spearman's rho correlation the relationships between PSIL and GENDER, PSIN and GENDER, PSIL and CLASS, and PSIN and CLASS were examined.

This concludes the research methodology. The next chapter describes the results of the statistical analyses.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

**A need exists to examine communication variables which may influence audience activity while watching television. The previous chapter explained the methodology used in the present study to investigate the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. The present chapter describes the results of this investigation including a description of the sample; the relationship between para-social interaction and the rhetorical reflector scale; the relationship between para-social interaction and the noble self scale; the relationship between para-social interaction and the rhetorical sensitivity scale; the reliability of the para-social interaction scales; the reliability of the rhetorical reflector scale, the noble self scale, and the rhetorical reflector scale; the relationship between para-social interaction, local, and para-social interaction, network; the relationships among the rhetorical reflector, noble self and rhetorical sensitivity scales; distribution bias and the para-social interaction scales; and the relationship between para-social interaction, age, and level of education.**

#### **Description of the Sample**

**The sample was composed of 157 undergraduate students enrolled in communication courses at the University of Texas at Arlington during the spring of 1986. The mean age of the respondents was 21.8, with an age range of 17 to 50. Fifty-six point six percent of the respondents were male and 43.4 percent were female. Twelve percent of the respondents were freshmen, 30 percent were sophomores, 39 percent were juniors, and 19 percent were seniors.**

### Para-Social Interaction and the Rhetorical Reflector Scale

A canonical correlation analysis was performed using the MANOVA procedure of the SPSS<sup>X</sup> program. This technique was used to discover if any significant relationships exist between one group consisting of para-social interaction variables and a second group consisting of rhetorical sensitivity variables. The criterion, or dependent, variables were Para-Social Interaction, Local, designated as PSIL, and Para-Social Interaction, Network, designated as PSIN. The predictor, or independent, variables were Noble Self, Rhetorical Reflector, and Rhetorical Sensitivity designated as NS, RR, and RS, respectively. The results of the canonical correlation analysis are reported in Table 1.

The first canonical root ( $R_c = .24$ ,  $p < .11$ ) and the second canonical root ( $R_c = .12$ ,  $p < .36$ ) were not significant ( $p < .05$ ). No significant relationship exists between the canonical variables.

Although the results of the canonical correlation were not significant, the strengths of the correlations suggest that relationships may exist between individual variables. A series of Pearson product-moment correlations was performed to determine the relationship among the individual variables. The results are reported in Table 2.

The first two hypotheses of this investigation predicted associations between para-social interaction and the rhetorical reflector scale. Based upon the Pearson correlations, the first hypothesis was not supported. There is no significant positive relationship between para-social interaction with local news viewing [PSIL] and scores on the rhetorical reflector scale [RR] ( $r = -.01$ ,  $p < .44$ ).

The second hypothesis was not supported. There is no significant positive relationship between para-social interaction with network news viewing [PSIN] and scores on the rhetorical reflector scale. There is no significant positive relationship between PSIN and RR ( $r = -.08$ ,  $p < .18$ ).



**Table 1**

**CANONICAL CORRELATION AND STRUCTURE MATRIX:  
PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTION AND RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY**

	<b>Root 1</b>		<b>Root 2</b>	
Canonical Correlation	.24		.12	
Eigenvalue	.06		.02	
Wilk's Lambda	.93		.99	
Chi-Square	1.74		1.03	
Degrees of Freedom	6.00		2.00	
Significance	p < .11		p < .36	
	<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>Pearson Correlations</b>	<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>Pearson Correlations</b>
<b>Set 1: Para-Social Interaction</b>				
PSI, Local	.78	.99	-1.44	-.16
PSI, Network	.26	.88	1.61	.47
% Variance Explained	Dependent [87.36]	Covariates [5.03]	Dependent [12.64]	Covariates [0.18]
<b>Set 2: Rhetorical Sensitivity</b>				
NS	1.84	.95	1.28	-.22
RR	.58	-.24	.35	-.71
RS	1.02	-.59	1.90	.81
% Variance Explained	Dependent [2.52]	Covariates [43.71]	Dependent [0.58]	Covariates [40.25]

**Table 2**

PEARSON CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS  
 BETWEEN PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTION, LOCAL,  
 PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTION, NETWORK, NOBLE SELF,  
 RHETORICAL REFLECTOR, AND RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY SCALES

---

	NS	RR	RS
PSI, Local	.27**	-.01	-.20*
PSI, Network	.22*	-.08	-.09

---

Note. \*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*  $P < .001$

### **Para-Social Interaction and the Noble Self Scale**

The second set of hypotheses predicted associations between para-social interaction and the noble self scale. The third hypothesis was not supported. There is no significant negative relationship between para-social interaction with local television news viewing [PSIL] and scores on the noble self scale [NS]. In fact, the reverse relationship is suggested. A significant positive relationship is demonstrated, however the correlation is low ( $r = .27, p < .001$ ).

The fourth hypothesis was not supported. There is no significant negative relationship between para-social interaction with network television news viewing [PSIN] and scores on the noble self scale. Once again a relationship in the opposite direction is suggested. A significant positive relationship is demonstrated, however the correlation is low ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ).

### **Para-Social Interaction and the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale**

The set of research questions sought to discover the association between para-social interaction and the rhetorical sensitivity scale. A significant negative relationship is demonstrated between para-social interaction with local television viewing [PSIL] and scores on the rhetorical sensitivity scale [RS], however the correlation is low ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ). The relationship between para-social interaction with network news viewing [PSIN] and scores on the rhetorical sensitivity scale is not significant ( $r = -.09, p < .14$ ).

### **Reliability of the Para-Social Interaction Scales**

The third set of research hypotheses predicted that the Rubin, Perse and

Powell Para-Social Interaction Scale for measuring para-social interaction associated with local television news viewing would be equally reliable for para-social interaction associated with network news viewing. Cronbach's alpha was determined by performing the RELIABILITY procedure of the SPSS<sup>X</sup> program. The fifth hypothesis was supported. The PSI Scale is a reliable measure of para-social interaction with network television news viewing ( $\alpha = .89$ ). The sixth hypothesis was also supported. The PSI scale was also found to be a reliable measure of para-social interaction with local television news viewing ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

#### Reliability of the Rhetorical Reflector Scale, the Noble Self Scale and the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale

The reliability of the three rhetorical sensitivity scales was investigated. Cronbach's alpha was determined for each scale by performing the RELIABILITY procedure of the SPSS<sup>X</sup> program. The alpha for the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale is .67. The alpha for the Rhetorical Reflector Scale is .58. The alpha for the Noble Self Scale is .71. The Noble Self Scale is considered reliable. The Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale has adequate reliability. The Rhetorical Reflector Scale possesses low reliability.

#### Para-Social Interaction, Local, versus Para-Social Interaction, Network

The final hypothesis predicted a significant difference between para-social interaction with local television news viewing and network news viewing. The T-TEST PAIRS procedure of the SPSS<sup>X</sup> program was performed. The seventh hypothesis was not supported. There is no significant difference between para-social interaction with local television news viewing and network news viewing ( $t = .07$ ,  $df = 148$ ,  $p < .94$ ). In fact, PSI, Local and PSI, Network, possess a significant and strong positive correlation

( $r = .79, p < .001$ ).

### The Rhetorical Reflector, Noble Self, and Rhetorical Sensitivity Scales

The relationships between the three rhetorical sensitivity scales were also investigated. Since a low score on the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale could represent either a Noble Self or a Rhetorical Reflector tendency, partial correlations were determined to analyze the interscale relationships. The PARTIAL CORR procedure of the SPSS<sup>x</sup> program was performed. The results are reported in Table 3.

The partial correlations reveal that all three scales possess strong negative correlations to each other ( $r_{NS\ RR\ RS} = -.88$ ,  $r_{NS\ RS\ RR} = -.95$ ,  $r_{RR\ RS\ NS} = -.89$ ). These results are in agreement with partial correlations reported by Hart, Carlson and Eadie (1980). These partial correlations suggest the scales to be measuring nearly independent regions along the rhetorical sensitivity continuum.

### Distribution Bias and the Para-Social Interaction Scales

A t-Test was used to determine if the distribution sequence of the PSI, Local, and the PSI, Network, scales had an influence on subject responses. This test was used to answer the question: Is there a significant difference between subjects who responded to the PSI Local scale first, then the PSI Network scale and subjects who responded to the PSI Network scale first, then to the PSI Local scale? The T-TEST GROUPS procedure of the SPSS<sup>x</sup> program was performed. There is no significant difference between the PSI Local scores for the two groups ( $t = .14$ ,  $df = 151$ ,  $p < .90$ ). There is no significant difference between the PSI Network scores for the two groups ( $t = -.54$ ,  $df = 149$ ,  $p < .59$ ). The distribution sequence did not influence the subjects' responses to the two para-social interaction scales.

**Table 3**

**PARTIAL CORRELATIONS BETWEEN  
THE NOBLE SELF SCALE, THE RHETORICAL REFLECTOR SCALE,  
AND THE RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY SCALE**

	RR	RS
NS	-.88 *	-.95*
RR		-.89*

Note. \*  $p < .001$ .

### **Para-Social Interaction, Age, and Level of Education**

Past mass communication studies have found that para-social interaction is related to age and level of education. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between para-social interaction and age. The Spearman's rho correlation was used to determine the relationship between para-social interaction and level of education. The PEARSON CORR and NONPAR CORR procedures of the SPSS <sup>x</sup> program were performed. In this investigation, no significant correlation exists between the variables of para-social interaction and the variables of age and level of education. The results of these procedures are reported in Table 4.

This concludes Chapter Four covering the results used to describe the sample, accept or reject hypotheses, and answer research questions. The next chapter discusses and describes limitations to this investigation.

**Table 4**

**CORRELATIONS BETWEEN  
PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTION,  
AGE, AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

	<b>AGE*</b>	<b>EDUCATION**</b>
<b>PSI, Local</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>.01</b>
<b>PSI, Network</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>-.005</b>
<b>NS</b>	<b>.07</b>	<b>.13</b>
<b>RR</b>	<b>.02</b>	<b>-.13</b>
<b>RS</b>	<b>-.03</b>	<b>-.02</b>

Note. \* Pearson's product-moment correlations.

\*\* Spearman's rho correlations.



## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Limitations

The purpose of this investigation was to expand on the work initiated by Levy and Windahl (1984) concerning media use and the communication sequence. They suggest that audience activity is an intervening variable in the mass communication process. Rubin and Rubin (1982) argue that "[i]t would be valuable to consider the linkages among interpersonal communication...and television use that render television to be an important communication vehicle for some persons" (p. 242). Based on these observations, this study sought to discover the nature of the relationship between television viewing and interpersonal communication. Specifically, this study examined the relationship between para-social interaction, a type of audience involvement during exposure to television, and rhetorical sensitivity, an attitude toward encoding spoken messages. Para-social interaction was examined in terms of local and network television news viewing.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is a discussion of the results reported in Chapter Four. The second section discusses the limitations inherent in this study.

### Discussion

Para-social interaction is characterized by a willingness to adapt and accept roles prescribed by the persons of a television program. The rhetorically sensitive person is one who accepts role taking as a natural part of the communication process and is willing to adapt in an interpersonal communication situation. The similarity of characteristics raised the question: Is there a relationship between para-social

interaction and rhetorical sensitivity? This study endeavored to answer this question.

The discussion begins with the relationships among para-social interaction for both local and network news viewing, rhetorical reflector scores, noble self scores, and rhetorical sensitivity scores. This is followed by a discussion of the reliability of the PSI Scales and the RHETSEN II Scales. The discussion section concludes with the relationship between para-social interaction with local television news viewing and para-social interaction with network television news viewing.

### Para-Social Interaction and Rhetorical Sensitivity

The first two sets of hypotheses dealt with the relationships between para-social interaction and the extremes of the rhetorical sensitivity continuum. The first set of hypotheses concerned the rhetorical reflector scale. Neither of the hypotheses was supported. The rhetorical reflector scale score correlations with PSI Local and PSI Network were not significant.

The second set of hypotheses predicted a negative relationship between para-social interaction and scores on the noble self scale. Neither of the hypotheses was supported. In fact, the correlation between noble self scores, PSI Local and PSI Network, appeared to be positive and significant, opposite the predicted direction.

The hypotheses were predicated on a person's willingness to adapt to roles prescribed by other people. According to these results, the assumption that the willingness to adapt functions the same for mass media communication and for interpersonal communication appears to be false. Those persons characterized by high noble self scores, less willing to adapt interpersonally, may be willing to engage in para-social interaction. On the other hand, those persons with high rhetorical reflector scores, with a need to adapt to a person, show no tendency to engage in para-social interaction.

The set of research questions concerned the relationship between para-social interaction and scores on the rhetorical sensitivity scale. The results suggest that PSI Local scores and scores on the rhetorical sensitivity scale are negative and significantly correlated. PSI Network scores and rhetorical sensitivity scores are not significantly correlated. These results coupled with the results of correlations with the noble self and rhetorical reflector scales describe a continuum. As one moves from the noble self end of the rhetorical sensitivity continuum towards the rhetorical reflector end, the tendency to engage in para-social interaction decreases. This description of the continuum is the opposite of the predicted description.

The rationale for the predicted direction of the hypotheses was the common characteristics between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity of adaptation and role acceptance. Previous empirical research concerning para-social interaction focused on the interpersonal aspects of media use. McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) described para-social interaction as a form of media companionship. Rosengren and Windahl (1972) described para-social interaction as the media user interacting with the media actor as if he or she was present. All of the empirical studies refer to Horton and Wohl's (1956) original definition of a para-social relationship as a "seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer" ( p.215). The para-social interaction studies have assumed the tenets of adaptability and role acceptance suggested by Horton and Wohl.

Previous empirical research concerning rhetorical sensitivity has included investigating the relationship between rhetorically sensitivity and occupations (communication disorder clinicians, Dowling and Bliss, 1984; nurses, Hart, Eadie, and Carlson, 1980), investigating the relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and behavior (accounting behavior, Kelly, 1981; verbal behavior, McCallister, 1981, and Rybacki, 1983), and investigating the relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and education (Carlson, 1978 and Schoen, 1981). All of these studies focused on the "sensitivity" of an

individual adapting to the needs of others. The empirical studies of rhetorical sensitivity relied on Hart and Burks' (1972) assumptions of accepting role-taking and a willingness to undergo adaptation.

The results of the present study demonstrate that the characteristics of para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity are not related in the way previous empirical research would suggest. The results point to an inverse relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. Darnell and Brockriede (1976) offer theoretical descriptions of the three rhetorical sensitivity classifications which may shed light on the findings. A previously unexplored factor, feedback, may serve to explain the relationship between these two variables.

This explanation lies in two dimensions. The dimensions that will be examined are the nature of communicative choices and the nature of intrapersonal communication. The discussion which follows is based on a theoretical explanation and provides post hoc explanation for this study's results. These explanations are without experimental support.

The first dimension, the nature of communicative choices, refers to the basis for rhetorical decisions used by noble selves, rhetorical reflectors, and rhetorical sensitives. Hart and Burks (1972) suggest that the "rhetorical decision is one of choosing among possible verbalizations, of deciding which role we should play at a given point in time" (p. 79). The noble self decides on the basis of self. She or he considers the situation and the other person secondarily, if at all, in making communicative choices. The noble self does not need feedback to be satisfied with an interpersonal transaction. Television offers the noble self a partner who provides no feedback. The noble self projects his or her perceptions, perspectives, and principles onto the other person. Noble selves "share a choice only by finding someone who chooses pretty much as they choose" (Darnell and Brockriede, 1976, p. 177). These characteristics suggest that once noble selves choose their news source they may project their perceptions and principles onto the

newscaster. This projection creates a perfect noble self partner. The newscaster becomes a reflection of the noble self. The noble self would have a tendency toward transaction with such a person. This tendency would explain the possible positive relationship between para-social interaction and noble self scores.

The nature of communicative choices may also explain the results concerning the relationship between para-social interaction and scores on the rhetorical reflector scale. Rhetorical reflectors "initiate neither monologue nor dialogue; they participate passively by responding to the monologue of another person..." (p. 179). This characteristic suggests that reflectors have a strong tendency toward para-social interaction. The results indicate no such tendency. The explanation for these results may lie in the rhetorical decisions of the rhetorical reflector. The only "choice" a rhetorical reflector makes is to accomodate reciprocal roles of the other person. The rhetorical reflector is a passive participant. She or he is dependent on the other person for rhetorical choices. The rhetorical reflector also desires to be liked. She or he feels it is important to please others and to be liked. These characteristics suggest that the rhetorical reflector may be extremely dependent on positive feedback from the other individual. Feedback verifies the other person's acceptance of the rhetorical reflector's chosen role. Since the television newscaster cannot project this type of "acceptance" feedback, the rhetorical reflector may have a tendency to avoid para-social interaction. This tendency would explain the lack of a relationship between para-social interaction and scores on the rhetorical reflector scale.

The nature of communicative choices may also explain the results concerning para-social interaction and scores on the rhetorical sensitivity scale. Rhetorical sensitives "engage in a transaction, in a merging of perspectives out of which is to come a series of shared choices" (Darnell and Brockriede, 1976, p. 180). The fundamental characteristics of the rhetorically sensitive person are engaging in transaction and sharing choices. These characteristics align in direct opposition to the characteristics of

para-social interaction. Para-social interaction is an "imagined" interaction. No actual transaction takes place. Without a transaction, the rhetorical sensitive cannot share choices. The characteristics associated with both the rhetorically sensitive person and para-social interaction suggest a tendency on the part of the rhetorical sensitive to avoid engaging in para-social interaction. This tendency would explain the negative relationship (significant only with PSI, Local) between para-social interaction and scores on the rhetorical sensitivity scale.

The nature of communicative choices may explain the results of this study. The rhetorical decisions concerning role selection made by the noble selves, rhetorical reflectors, and rhetorical sensitives are based on self, the other person, and the prospect of shared choices, respectively. Feedback appears to be a necessity for the rhetorical reflector and the rhetorical sensitive. Para-social interaction is an imagined transaction. The greater the emphasis a person places on the other individual as the basis for a rhetorical decision, the less likely she or he will engage in para-social interaction. On the other hand, the greater the emphasis a person places on herself or himself for a rhetorical decision, the more likely she or he will engage in para-social interaction.

One area associated with the nature of communicative choices is the nature of television news viewing. The nature of television news viewing refers to the instrumental and ritualized uses of television. Instrumental television use is intentional, goal-directed, and focuses on content. Ritualized television use is diversionary, time consuming, and focuses on the medium. Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) found that "[p]ara-social interaction was associated with the instrumental use of television news" (p. 177). This association may help to explain the results of this study.

The noble self is a dominating communicator. She or he wishes to control the communication situation. The rhetorical reflector is a subordinating communicator. She or he wishes to be guided or managed. The rhetorical sensitive is a cooperating communicator. She or he wishes to engage in neither absolute control nor absolute

subordination. Rather, she or he wishes to engage in a transaction.

The communicative choices of the noble self are self directed. A noble self may have a tendency to engage in instrumental television use rather than ritualized television use. Instrumental television use is associated with para-social interaction. Scores on the noble self scale are associated with para-social interaction. This tendency would partially explain the significant positive relationship between para-social interaction and scores on the noble self scale.

The communicative choices of the rhetorical reflector are other directed. A rhetorical reflector may have a tendency to engage in neither instrumental nor ritualized television use. The rhetorical reflector needs acceptance feedback. Television offers no role approval feedback. This tendency would explain the lack of a relationship between para-social interaction and scores on the rhetorical reflector scale.

The communicative choices of the rhetorical sensitive are transactionally directed. A rhetorical sensitive may have a tendency to engage in ritualized television use rather than instrumental television use. The rhetorical sensitive thrives on shared choices. Television offers no shared choices. This tendency would explain the negative relationship between para-social interaction and scores on the rhetorical sensitivity scale. Instrumental and ritualized use of television news provide a variable which may explain the results of this study.

The second dimension, the nature of intrapersonal communication, refers to the internal processes associated with para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. Both communication concepts function internally. They are both intrapersonal by nature, though they are applied to different types of communication situations, mass communication and interpersonal communication, respectively. However, each is related to a different internal process. Para-social interaction is related to the internal process of decoding. People watch the news and decode the information they receive from the television screen. Rhetorical sensitivity is related to the internal process of

encoding. By definition, rhetorical sensitivity is the attitude toward encoding spoken messages. Para-social interaction involves a process of externally receiving and internally decoding information, while rhetorical sensitivity involves a process of internally encoding and externally sending information. These processes are functionally distinct. This distinction may explain the low correlation and lack of relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity.

The nature of communicative choices and the nature of intrapersonal communication are dimensions which may explain the results of this study. There may be other explanations as to why the rhetorical sensitivity continuum moves from a positive relationship to a negative relationship to no relationship with para-social interaction. The two dimensions discussed suggest initial areas to search for explanations.

### Reliability

The third set of hypotheses concerned the reliability of the Rubin, Perse, and Powell Para-Social Interaction Scale. The scale's reliability had been previously tested for para-social interaction with local television news viewing. The alpha was .95 (Rubin et al., 1985). In this study, the scale's reliability was tested for network news viewing, as well as retested for local news viewing. The alpha was .89 for both network news viewing and local news viewing. The alphas suggest the scale is a reliable measure for both types of television news. Previously, researchers designed instruments to measure specific news program types such as local news, network news, and news magazine programs. Researchers now have a specific instrument for measuring para-social interaction with local and network television news programs.

Although hypotheses were not suggested, the reliability of the three internal rhetorical sensitivity scales were tested. The Noble Self Scale possesses the highest



reliability with an alpha of .71. The Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale possesses the second highest reliability with an alpha of .67. The Rhetorical Reflector Scale possesses the lowest reliability with an alpha of .58. The rhetorical reflector reliability results may offer a partial explanation for the low correlations between para-social interaction and rhetorical reflector scores. There is a strong negative relationship between the Rhetorical Reflector Scale and the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale. However, the Rhetorical Reflector Scale may not be consistently measuring an extreme of the rhetorical sensitivity continuum.

#### Para-Social Interaction: Local and Network Television News Viewing

The seventh and final hypothesis predicted a difference between para-social interaction with local television news viewing and para-social interaction with network television news viewing. This hypothesis was not supported. In this study, there is no difference between para-social interaction with local news viewing and with network news viewing. Although not hypothesized, the two situations of para-social interaction possess a significant positive relationship. Structural program format differences do not appear to make a difference in the tendency toward para-social interaction.

The strong association between both news situations may be explained by the consistent positive relationship between para-social interaction and scores on the noble self scale. For example, noble selves engage in para-social interaction. If noble selves engage in instrumental television use for informational purposes, then they would be considered content-oriented. The different types of structural formats would then be unimportant to an individual engaged in para-social interaction. The correlation between para-social interaction for local and network news viewing suggests that persons who have a tendency toward para-social interaction with one type of news viewing may also have a tendency toward para-social interaction with the other type of

news viewing.

Although there is no difference between PSI, Local, and PSI, Network, there is a difference between PSI, Local, and PSI, Network, when examining rhetorical sensitivity. In the cases where a significant correlation is demonstrated, PSI Local correlates higher with the Noble Self Scale and the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale than does PSI Network. One explanation could be that the local newscaster is a superior para-social partner to the network newscaster. However, the correlations are low and such an explanation must be considered with caution.

This concludes the discussion section covering the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity, reliability, and the relationship between para-social interaction with local and network television news viewing.

The next section discusses the limitations of this investigation.

### Limitations

This study was designed to explore the relationships between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. The limitations of this study are covered in this section. Limitations are discussed in four areas. First, the present study is limited by its exploratory nature. Second, the present study is limited by the nature of its sample. . Third, the present study is limited by the nature of the instruments used to measure the variables. Finally, the present study is limited by the nature of the results

The first limitation of this study is its exploratory nature. Only one previous investigation (Corison, 1982) relates a communication variable, communication avoidance, to para-social interaction. This study examined a relatively unexplored region of association. The nature of such a preliminary investigation limits the extrapolation of results to short term suggestions rather than long term conclusions. However, this is a limitation of consideration, not of investigation. There is still a need to

study the relationship between mass media communication and interpersonal communication.

The second limitation of this study is the nature of the sample. The sample was drawn from college students enrolled in communication courses towards the end of the Spring semester of 1986. Schoen (1981) found that students increased in their rhetorical sensitivity scores and decreased their rhetorical reflector scores after taking a basic speech course. Since all of the subjects were enrolled in a communication course, Schoen's findings may suggest an influence on the rhetorical sensitivity scores. Taking regional differences into account, the age and classification of the respondents justify extrapolation to the general college student population. However, conclusions and applications concerning the general population are inappropriate.

The third limitation of this study relates to the instruments used to measure the variables. Specifically, the alphas of the Rhetorical Reflector Scale and the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale are low enough to bring into question the reliability of these scales. The uniqueness of the sample may explain the low reliability scores on the Rhetorical Reflector Scale. Conclusions and applications concerning the relationship between para-social interaction and these two scales are suspect.

The Para-Social Interaction Scale possesses high reliability for measuring both local and network television news viewing. The scale is an instrument which measures para-social interaction with news personae. This aspect of the scale is an inherent limitation of the study. Conclusions and applications concerning general television viewing are inappropriate.

The final area of limitation is the nature of the results. The significant correlations between para-social interaction and the three measures of rhetorical sensitivity are moderate to weak. Conclusions and applications drawn from these results should be examined closely for the strength of the relationships.

This concludes Chapter Five covering the discussion and limitations of this

**study. The final chapter is a summary and conclusion to this study.**

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

Electronic media are a significant part of American life. The number of television sets and radios exceeds the U.S. population. People use television in a number of different ways. Past researchers have suggested some people use television to fulfill their need for social interaction. The use of television to meet the need for social interaction was the impetus for this study. This chapter discusses the suggestions for future research.

The present study sought to determine the relationship between mass communication and interpersonal communication. Mass communication was defined in terms of para-social interaction. Interpersonal communication was defined in terms of rhetorical sensitivity. The focus of this study was on the individual television viewer watching local and network news. It asked the questions: Is there a relationship between the way an individual watches local and network television new programs and an attitude that he or she holds toward interpersonal communication? Specifically, is there a relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity?

The results and limitations provide a basis for suggestions concerning future research. The results of the study are tentative. No strong correlations between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity were demonstrated. The lack of confirmation of this study's hypotheses does not prove that an inverse relationship exists between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. The first suggestion for future research is to confirm the findings of this study. None of the hypotheses was supported. In fact, significant relationships were demonstrated in the opposite direction predicted by the hypotheses. Research could be conducted aimed at proving the reverse directions are significant and can be accepted. Future research could also include classification of noble selves, rhetorical reflectors, and rhetorical sensitives using all three scales in

conjunction with each other.

This confirmation research could include a reconceptualization of rhetorical sensitivity. The low reliability of the three internal scales, the apparent independence of each scale, and the post hoc explanation of the results suggest that the RHETSEN II scale may be measuring something beyond an attitude toward encoding spoken messages. Adaptation and role-acceptance are predicated on feedback received from the other person in an interpersonal transaction. Without feedback, there is no need to adapt. Without feedback, role choice and acceptance become irrelevant. The RHETSEN II scale may be measuring a decoding attitude toward accepting verbal and nonverbal feedback. Reconceptualization of rhetorical sensitivity may also be necessary to improve the reliability of the internal scales.

Confirmation research could also incorporate other variables which may provide insight into the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity. The opportunity for personal interaction may explain an individual's tendency toward para-social interaction as it relates to his or her rhetorical sensitivity. The greater an individual's opportunity for personal interaction, the less likely he or she will engage in para-social interaction (Gregg, 1971; Levy, 1979). For example, based on the results of this study, one would expect the greater an individual's opportunity for personal interaction, the higher he or she will score on the rhetorical reflector scale. The inverse relationship may be expected between the opportunity for personal interaction and the noble self scale.

A second suggestion for future research is to expand the investigation of the relationship between mass communication and interpersonal communication. Mass communication occurs in a one-way channel. The absence of feedback unique to mass communication provides a valuable tool in understanding how feedback functions in interpersonal communication.

The results of this study suggest that there is a relationship between mass communication and interpersonal communication. The concept of para-social

interaction provides an initial tool to study the questions concerning feedback. At present, the Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) PSI Scale is limited to local and network television news viewing. Future research could focus on expanding the concept of para-social interaction into other types of programs and other forms of media. For example, does radio listening, with listener call-in games, constitute a unique form of communication, distinct from both interpersonal communication and para-social interaction? These questions could lead to a better understanding of face-to-face communication (as in a conversation), person-to-person mediated communication (as in a telephone conversation), and mass communication (as in listening to a radio).

In conclusion, this study was an extension of work initiated by Levy and Windahl (1984). They suggest that audience activity influences the mass communication process. The present study sought to determine what type of relationship, if any, exists between mass communication (in terms of an individual's tendency toward watching television news as if it were an interpersonal transaction) and his or her attitude toward interpersonal communication. Specifically, this study asked the question: "What is the relationship between para-social interaction and rhetorical sensitivity?"

This study found that the relationship between an individual's television news watching habits and his or her attitude toward interpersonal communication were weakly related. The hypotheses were not supported; however, significant relationships were suggested in the opposite direction of the hypotheses. The greater the tendency for an individual to watch television news as if he or she may be engaged in a face-to-face conversation, the less likely that he or she is sensitive to the needs of others in a real interpersonal transaction. The suggested research directions need to be investigated if more is to be learned about the relationship between mass communication and interpersonal communication.

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These consist of pages:

Appendix A, pages 85-86 (Paraxocial Interaction Scale)

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Appendix B, pages 87-89 (The Phetsen II Scale)

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Appendix C, pages 90-91 (Instruction for Scoring)

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## **Appendix D**

### **Communication Survey Packet**

**THIS IS A COMMUNICATION SURVEY. READ AND FOLLOW ALL INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY. PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS HONESTLY AND TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. PLEASE USE THE ANSWER SHEET PROVIDED FOR ALL OF YOUR ANSWERS. ONCE YOU HAVE COMPLETED A SECTION, DO NOT GO BACK. ALL OF YOUR RESPONSES WILL REMAIN STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.**

**I. Please write down your social security number.**

**II. Please circle your gender.**

**III. Please write down your age.**

**IV. Please circle your classification.**

**Listed below are a number of statements about communication. Please respond to each statement individually. For each statement, please indicate your opinion by circling one of the following:**

- A = almost always true**
- B = frequently true**
- C = sometimes true**
- D = infrequently true**
- E = almost never true**

**[PLACE THE RHETSEN II HERE. SEE APPENDIX B]**



**Appendix D  
(Continued)**

**I. Which of the following is your favorite television network for the national evening news? Please circle only one.**

- A. ABC, The American Broadcasting Network**
- B. CBS, The Columbia Broadcasting Network**
- C. CNN, The Cable News Network**
- D. INN, The Independent News Network.**
- E. NBC, The National Broadcasting Network**

**II. Who is your favorite television network newscaster? Please print his or her name and his or her network in the space provided.**

**III. Listed below are a number of statements about network news programs. Please respond to each statement individually. For each statement, please indicate your opinion by circling one of the following:**

- A=strongly agree**
- B = agree**
- C = no opinion**
- D = disagree**
- E = strongly disagree**

**[PLACE THE PARASOCIAL INTERACTION SCALE HERE. SEE APPENDIX A]**

**I. Which of the following is your favorite local television news station for local evening news? Please circle only one.**

- A. KDFW, Channel 4**
- B. KXAS, Channel 5**
- C. WFAA, Channel 8**
- D. KTVT, Channel 11**
- E. KERA, Channel 13**
- F. KXTA, Channel 21**
- G. KDFI, Channel 27**
- H. KNBN, Channel 33**
- I. KLTJ, Channel 49**

**Appendix D  
(Continued)**

**II. Who is your favorite local television newscaster? Please print his or her name and his or her station call letters in the space provided.**

**III. Listed below are a number of statements about local news programs. Please respond to each statement individually. For each statement, please indicate your opinion by circling one of the following:**

**A=strongly agree  
B = agree  
C = no opinion  
D = disagree  
E = strongly disagree**

**[PLACE THE PARASOCIAL INTERACTION SCALE HERE. SEE APPENDIX A]**

**ANSWER SHEET**

**I. Social Security Number:**     \_\_\_ \_\_\_ - \_\_\_ - \_\_\_

**II. Gender:**                      **Male**                      **Female**

**III. Age:**                      \_\_\_\_\_

**IV. Classification:**       **Freshman**       **Sophomore**       **Junior**       **Senior**

Appendix D  
(Continued)

Answer Sheet for Page \_\_\_\_

I. A B C D E

II. My favorite network newscaster is:

---

(his or her full name)

My favorite network newscaster is on:

---

(network call letters)

III.

PAGE \_\_\_\_

1. A B C D E

2. A B C D E

3. A B C D E

4. A B C D E

5. A B C D E

6. A B C D E

7. A B C D E

8. A B C D E

9. A B C D E

10. A B C D E

PAGE \_\_\_\_

11. A B C D E

12. A B C D E

13. A B C D E

14. A B C D E

15. A B C D E

16. A B C D E

17. A B C D E

18. A B C D E

19. A B C D E

20. A B C D E

Appendix D  
(Continued)

Answer Sheet for Page \_\_\_\_

I. A B C D E F G H I

II. My favorite local newscaster is:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(his or her full name)

My favorite local newscaster is on:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(station call letters)

III.

PAGE \_\_\_\_

PAGE \_\_\_\_

1. A B C D E

11. A B C D E

2. A B C D E

12. A B C D E

3. A B C D E

13. A B C D E

4. A B C D E

14. A B C D E

5. A B C D E

15. A B C D E

6. A B C D E

16. A B C D E

7. A B C D E

17. A B C D E

8. A B C D E

18. A B C D E

9. A B C D E

19. A B C D E

10. A B C D E

20. A B C D E

Appendix D  
(Continued)

Answer Sheet for Page \_\_\_\_

PAGE ____	PAGE ____	PAGE ____
1. A B C D E	16. A B C D E	31. A B C D E
2. A B C D E	17. A B C D E	32. A B C D E
3. A B C D E	18. A B C D E	33. A B C D E
4. A B C D E	19. A B C D E	34. A B C D E
5. A B C D E	20. A B C D E	35. A B C D E
6. A B C D E	21. A B C D E	36. A B C D E
7. A B C D E	22. A B C D E	37. A B C D E
8. A B C D E	23. A B C D E	38. A B C D E
9. A B C D E	24. A B C D E	39. A B C D E
10. A B C D E	25. A B C D E	40. A B C D E
11. A B C D E	26. A B C D E	
12. A B C D E	27. A B C D E	
13. A B C D E	28. A B C D E	
14. A B C D E	29. A B C D E	
15. A B C D E	30. A B C D E	

## **Vita**

**Michael Anthony Domingue was born on February 24, 1956, in Lafayette, Louisiana. He is the son of Robert Louis Domingue and Jeanne Hebert Domingue.**

**From 1962 through 1974, he attended elementary and high school at a parochial school, Cathedral-Carmel.**

**Michael attended the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, Louisiana, where he entered the general business curriculum and competed in debate. He coached high school students during summer and also worked part-time at the Lafayette Public Library as a reference assistant. He received his B.S. in Business Administration in May, 1978.**

**Michael entered the masters program in Rhetorical and Public Address at U.S.L. in the Fall of 1979. He served as the assistant debate coach for U.S.L. and taught public speaking. He received an M.S. in Rhetoric and Public Address in December, 1979.**

**In the Fall of 1980, Michael entered the doctoral program in Speech at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He served as the assistant debate coach for L.S.U. while completing his required coursework. During this time, Michael also worked part-time as a PBX operator for C. J. Brown, Realtors and, later, as a full-time customer service representative for Community Coffee Company.**

**In September of 1984, Michael moved to Arlington, Texas, to accept a position as adjunct professor at the University of Texas at Arlington. He served as the assistant debate coach and taught public speaking.**

**During the summer of 1986, Michael completed his doctoral dissertation entitled "Para-Social Interaction, Rhetorical Sensitivity, and Television News Watching."**

**In September of 1986, he began a new position as Assistant Professor of Communication at the University of Texas at Arlington.**

**He received his Ph.D. from Louisiana State University in December of 1986.**


# DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

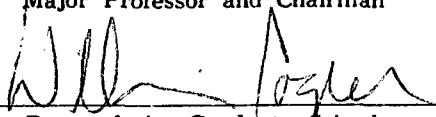
Candidate: Michael A. Domingue

Major Field: Speech

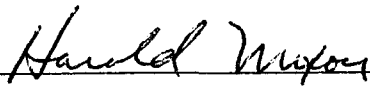
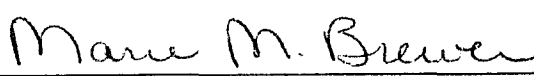
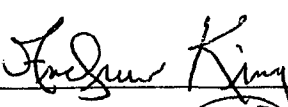

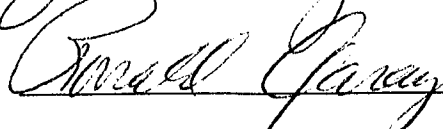
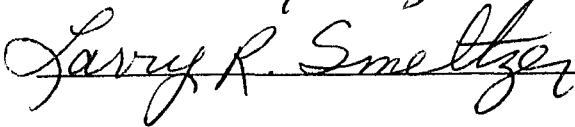
Title of Dissertation: Para-Social Interaction, Rhetorical Sensitivity, and  
Television News Viewing

Approved:

  
Major Professor and Chairman

  
Dean of the Graduate School

## EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:

August 1, 1986